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Chroma

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A QUEER LITERARY JOURNAL **Chroma** Issue 9 - Summer 2009

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Judith Barrington

Sestina for the Time Zones

I'm used to it now—how seven o'clock
in the morning is also 3 pm, and how waking
to pink-tinged Oregon clouds, I look out and see
the afternoon traffic surging towards the Angel,
London taxis racing full tilt into rush hour.
I pull on a sweatshirt and put on the kettle for tea

while somewhere in Sussex they're walking the dog: tea-
time for them happens daily at four o'clock.
I measure out oatmeal, sort through the muddle of hours,
and think of my mother, memory coming awake.
Pink-tinged clouds move aside as if for an angel
above the downs where wind blows salt from the sea.

But surely it's morning and this must be breakfast I see
on the blue cloth with vitamins waiting beside the tea-
pot? Tell me, has something or someone—devil or angel—
messed with the sprockets and cogs of the world's crazy clock?
Is it not safe to believe, at dawn when I wake,
the green bedside digits proclaiming the hour?

I seem to be stuck with one foot in England's hour,
time zones colliding somewhere above the sea.
Later on, when people I miss start to wake,
I'll be climbing the stairs to bed, no late-night tea
in my hand (as they would have there) but the faulty clock
in my body saying *sleep*, saying *wake*, and the prankster angel

who lives on the cusp of the arc—the angel
who holds in each hand a string to each hour—
fanning her wing to hide the deceptive clock.
While I fall asleep, they'll be parting their curtains to see
if the red leaves have scattered, blown by fall's gusty
breeze. While I sink into sleep, they'll be coming awake,

and pouring the water on coffee grounds, wak-
ing to steam that mingles with cigarette smoke. The angel
mocks me. I float into dreams through misty
time, minutes join hands to surround the hours,
and mother emerges from some long-forgotten sea
ignoring my sleep and the steady advance of the clock.

I smile at her, so long dead, but the buzzer will wake
me right on the hour and she will return to her sea.
Don't leave, I'll say to the angel—*please stay for tea!*



Passing

Simon Croft

“I know you, don’t I?” She was tiny, getting older, well over seventy, but still with the same coal black hair, tight lips, acid eyes, and high heels hiding her four foot ten.

“Yes,” I said, and walked away, into the kitchen, without elaborating or saying who I was, or telling her she’d known me since I was born. I walked away leaving an old lady confused and snubbed, and avoided recognising a tinge of smugness with a hint of revenge.

I went up to Liz, my aunt. “Anything I can do?”

It was her husband’s funeral – Mum’s brother, John. He was a nice man – except if you got him started on Margaret Thatcher, whose name seemed to flip some primordial head-switch for incandescent rage.

With Mum long gone, after my Dad, who would have tried his hardest, but been hopeless, and my Aunt Dilys, who would have tried her hardest and been some use, if I was in trouble I’d have gone to my Uncle John, who in all probability would have been the most practical help.

The last person I would have gone to was Aunt May, who I’d left standing in the front room wondering just who the hell I was and why I’d walked off.

“No thanks, love,” said Liz, “I think we’re all sorted.”

So there was no excuse to stay in the kitchen. Tea, sandwiches, separating the paper doilies – I’d have been your man; I could even have seen myself tarting around arranging a pot of flowers for half an hour despite barely being able to tell the leaves from the petals. But no.

With hindsight, I should have seen it coming. There’s a certain sort of person that reads gender first and who you actually are second, so if you don’t present the gender they expect (as in the last one they saw you wearing), they simply can’t work out who you are. It’s as if, having identified the person in front of them as male, they only look for a match in the Men I Know compartment of their memory and of course – well, in my case, anyway – they don’t find you there.

I’ve had it before – there’s a faint recognition, a sense that you look a bit like someone they know,

but that’s as far as it gets. It’s quite different to people who recognise you as a person first, then they read all the gender stuff and realise – oh, right... and their face does a kind of accelerated Lambada as they process the situation, or the people who recognise you, but pretend not to because they don’t want to deal with the gender thing (surreptitious Lambada), or the people who recognise you, then think they’ve made a mistake (embarrassed Lambada, usually followed by curious Waltz), or the people who just take it all in as a package, grin, and say, “Shit, that suits you!”

No – this is typical of a certain kind of rigid thought and May, starchy-stiff matriarch of the Order of Rules, Conformity and Appearances, was always going to be that type.

But I hadn’t thought that far ahead. So, I meet her for the first time since the last family funeral (Aunt Dilys – second on the When In Trouble list) and what do I do?

Do I say, “La, Aunt May, it is I, Simon, previously known as...”? Do I add, “You remember that phone call and letter a few years back after which you deleted me from your Christmas card list, even though I am now happy and not the miserable sod that I was before”? Or do I skulk off into the kitchen and avoid the situation?

Births, marriages and deaths. The first two tend to be reasonably predictable. To be fair, Uncle John had been on his way long enough to choose an eco-friendly wicker coffin, totter round the Isabella Plantation in Richmond Park looking for a place to scatter his ashes and give me one of his prized marathon medals.

But all too frequently, funerals catch you on the hop, and for those of us who transition, you can get caught mid-way between genders, like being caught mid-way across the kitchen floor at 2am heading for biscuits and ice-cream. What do you do? Brazen it out? Pretend they’re mistaken? (I was just getting a glass of yummy water... to eat with this... er, spoon). And what do you wear? It is not the time you want to be thinking, “Does my

bust look big in this?"

There might be people you haven't told mixing with people you have, or people you've chosen not to tell, or people you never expected to see again and so hadn't bothered to tell or, as in my case, people who haven't spoken to you since they found out.

All those people, relationships, feuds, he-said-she-saids, slights and factions, compressed by shared loss, sparking with tight funereal emotions, a mix held together by a surface tension of politeness, with all the unpleasant potential of a bowl of cornflakes laced with chilli powder.

May was the eldest and now last of four siblings – it seemed unfair and unkind to have "the conversation" there and then, to put her on the spot. Though was it more unfair to leave someone else to explain who I was? What should I do? I wasn't going to stand there and let her verbally squash me when I had no way of standing up for myself that wouldn't make me look like a right shit. Having a go at an elderly lady at her brother's funeral wasn't on my to-do list.

Nor was I going to invoke a situation where people felt they had to take sides. This was John's day, and Liz's day and their children's day and all sorts of other days; it wasn't about me and my gender. Unfortunately, a Sex Change has a nasty habit of taking centre stage just when you don't want it to, and funerals are pretty much top of the Sex-Change-Gremlin's fun activities list.

At my Dad's funeral, I wanted to do the proper son thing and carry his coffin, but recent knee surgery made me apprehensive. Still, I figured he'd been really thin when he died – couldn't weigh much between four of us. The undertakers even managed to find three other five foot two male pall bearers – I have no idea where – for all I knew, they could've been *Star Wars* Ewok extras from Shepperton Studios just up the road.

It was only when the coffin was sliding out of the hearse that I realised Dad might not have weighed much, bless him, but coffins weigh a ton. The short walk into the Chapel of Rest was a litany of panic – dontdropit-dontdropit-dontdropit-DONOTDROP YOURDEADDAD.

On the plus side, it didn't leave a lot of room to worry about the who-knew-what about me until after the service. I was standing looking at the flowers when one of Dad's friends whom I hadn't met before approached. "Greg had a daughter, didn't he? Is she here? I don't recall him mentioning a son..."

Faced with a question, the honest and direct answer to which will out me, I have only three basic options: lie, tell the truth, or evade the question. I've become fairly expert at combining the last two, largely because I'm completely shit at telling an out-and-out lie.

"All Dad's children are here," I said firmly, hoping

Dad would forgive the implication he had surreptitiously fathered a brood of extra-marital children.

And then there was a friend's father's wake. I was passing well; I'd been on T for four months, so I looked like an eighteen year old lad in his first suit, dutifully passing round the sherry and sandwiches on the instructions of the grown-ups, but that was okay. Okay until I was introduced as a thirty-something man to the little old blind lady who cocked her head to one side when I said hello and crumpled her face into an enquiry. I knew she was sure she could hear a woman, and I really didn't want to hear the question, so I left with indecent haste before she'd had time to grab more than a couple of crisps. Off to the kitchen, avoiding the confused, snubbed, and hungry old lady.

Perhaps the moral of all this is: Just stay in the kitchen. It's bound to be easier. At least there are cupboards you can pretend to be looking through for cornflakes and chilli.

May was silhouetted against the window, mouth pursed in disapproval, the front inch of her hair spray-welded into a kind of cliff for extra height, though the rest of it was flat. I looked down. How she still managed four-inch heels at seventy I really don't know. I had a vision of her barefoot, going around on tip-toes, her feet forever fixed into high-heel-shoe shape. I wondered if she had high-heel slippers. Or if the hair-cliff caught the wind like a sail, blowing her round the shoe shops like a wobbly galleon, a flag of bright crimson lipstick run up to repel boarders.

I'm five foot two. I have flat hair and flat shoes. I think there are more important things. This is where May and I come unstuck. But, if appearances are so unimportant to me, how do I rationalise those components of transition which are all about that: how I appear to myself, how I appear to others, passing. And that's no small part. Getting the new wardrobe, new chest, new haircut, new watch, new beard (new bald patch!) – how much of this is reflecting my sense of self out to the world through appearance?

Maybe the difference is that when I train at the gym, I don't just work my "mirror" muscles, I work the ones on the back, too. And I don't actually mind the bald patch.

I ducked out of the way before she spotted me. There'd been enough people in the front room who knew me to fill her in, and judging by the pursed lips, someone probably had. Just for today, that could be someone else's problem. I wished I felt a bit better about it.

Her husband pottered into the kitchen. We chatted. Neither of us mentioned May. Or sex changes.

They gave me the best presents when I was a kid, the sort your parents hate: a Bontempi organ one

Christmas, a Bontempi accordion the next, and then, best of all, a Potter's Wheel. It made a sound like fingernails on a blackboard and flung soggy clay further than anyone might think possible on a couple of AA batteries. Outstanding.

I wondered if their gifts were a dig at my parents.

Perhaps that's what bothered me most about May - the way she illuminated what I liked least about myself - everything negative, defensive, suspicious, aggressive; my capacity to think the worst of people. That I could feel so angry when she gave me one of "those" looks and made hushed comments to her neighbour, the content of which I could only guess at. That her loudly unspoken disapproval could upset me so, make me feel guilty about being myself, about being happy. That I could end up fantasising about shouting at an elderly lady, about sneaking up with giant scissors and cutting her hair-cliff off out of sheer spite.

I can't pretend I don't find an element of vindictive glee in the fact that the two longest standing relationships in my generation of the family are those of my cousin and his boyfriend of twenty years and the nineteen-year relationship I've shared with my wife.

At the service, I went in with the main group and found a seat. May came in almost last, and looked around (making her entrance?) (damn! bad thoughts again!). People were standing two or three deep at the back; there was nowhere left.

I went to stand up. My wife, normally the kindest and most generous of people, whispered, "Let someone else..."

"No, love," I said. "She's old. It's her brother."

May took my seat. Offering your seat to old ladies - that's what men do; standing at the back of funerals - that's what less important mourners do. Was that win-win or lose-lose? And why am I keeping score at a funeral? I don't like how I think when I'm around May.

The wake was busy. I circulated and chatted and reminisced, negotiating past and present with one eye always on the conversation horizon for the next pronoun or gendered phrase.

"When I was in the... local youth group (do not say 'Brownies'), the... outfit (do not say 'dress') was fucking awful."

Shit.

"Did I just say fuck? Sorry."

Eventually, I met up with May's husband again. Elderly as he was, his faded eyes still had a thin twinkle about them. I suspected he wouldn't mind if I said "fuck." After a few minutes, he looked to see where May was and I followed his glance. Time to say hello.

As I began to make my way across the room, she saw me coming, pursed the crimson flag and scuttled

away. Within two minutes, she'd gathered her husband and left.

That was the last time I saw her. I don't know if she's alive or dead.

"I know you, don't I?" That was the last thing she said to me. Probably the last thing she ever will. It's a pity she's wrong. ■

Gregory Woods

Special Relationship

Willa Cather:

How like a girl he is! So eager to enjoy
As much attention as a people can unfurl,
A budding Helen-of, anticipating Troy.

Gregarious, his habitat the social whirl
From country house weekend to tea at the Savoy,
Coquettish with both farmhand and decrepit earl—

But, crossed, there's not an oath he'd scruple to deploy
Against them all, as if he'd hoarded words to hurl
At them like petty thunderbolts. How like a boy!

Stephen Tennant:

How like a boy she is! With not a flounce or curl
To soften her, she bristles like an Iroquois,
Her style adopted from a place where dust-storms swirl

And bison roam, as if created to destroy
Mere femininity. Yet it would take a churl
To overlook the Venus in her corduroy:

Addressing her is casting swine before a pearl;
And, boldly though she breasts the prairie (Ship ahoy!),
She needs a swell to buoy her up. How like a girl!

10

Marita Gootee
Untitled #10



Anna Bendix

Long Distances

Hungover, in winter,
walking by the Hudson River,
New York thick with snow,

the pavements buried
on which Hassidim, Poles,
Mexicans, Sicilians, Finns go,

the Greenpoint diner closed,
(yesterday
a waitress sang My Way,

refilling my good coffee,
putting me inside a story),
my buckled leather boots
below,

(extortionate, really,
on your first city salary),
your pretzel cheeks fleshy,
your salt eyes
happy,

(that night a party in a loft
apartment, there even was a poet
in a beret,
one single iron bed

in the vast room, Prospect Park
on view. How many worlds
can I inhabit?),
miles

go by, there is no other way
home. A man digging out his car
holds up one hand, calls out
Hello.

At this distance, now,
I *Google Earth* from SW2 to you,
fall

into Brooklyn, feel the ground
closing in. There, the loft, the river.
There, the long-ago snow.

Precious

Jade Brooks

12

Her name was Precious and she was just 16. She had lips full and dripping melted chocolate and wine, they were like skipping-stones smoothed by the creek, soft as ripe nectarines. She taunted me, Precious. She drove me crazy. Her mother was dead and she had her name tattooed big and flowery across her arm and 7-16-98 for the date she died. We worked together at Subway and both had to wear polyester-blend collared shirts and I looked sick, scraggly hair pulled back, my hands reeking of tuna and stale cheese, mayonnaise, rotting roast beef. Precious would pull her jeans down low, cock her hat to one side so soft curls peeked out, wink at me from the other side of the deli. Oh god. I would shudder.

She didn't want me, not really. She wanted her ex, some 15-year-old who dumped her the month before but still called to scream about her talking to other girls. Precious kept the girl's picture in her wallet and she'd show it to me—this girl all straightened hair, lip liner dark and thick, big tits straining out of a wife-beater, all soft focus. Precious would wait for my reaction, watching my eyes like waiting for me to spook. I was twenty and mean with a broken heart and I wanted to tell her I'd put out. I wanted her to think I was dangerous.

One night, I saw her on the street, out high and wandering. I was walking home from this radical queer strip show, all gussied up in heels, fishnets, little dress. I had on red lipstick and sparkles for eye shadow. All very generic, very late-90s riot grrrl overdone. Drunk, I leered at her, dragged her home with promises of cigarettes. All she wanted was a cigarette. She sat on our front porch while my housemate asked her life questions, offered to read her tarot, plunged deep. She talked a lot, just wanted people to talk to and I stood leaning on the wall opposite them, pouting and watched dark after-rain clouds move fast across the night sky.

Every day at Subway, we grew a little older in that air conditioned vacuum, just freeze-dried anxiety, smothered by cardboard food. Everything from bread to lettuce was sent to us frozen solid in boxes from somewhere far away, some temple of Subway

gods. I always imagined these evil white guys wearing Subway visor caps sitting down under us all in Subway hell, laboratories with bubbling chemical combinations in large beakers and vats, yielding giant rolls of packing tape, and sending us frozen crap. Throughout the day everything would slowly thaw in the deli case and sometimes, making a sandwich, you would hit a big ice block of lettuce and have to kind of crumble it out slowly without the customer noticing.

Literally everyone who worked there was on drugs, even the boss's daughter (Vicodin). Throughout the day we would take our breaks in cars or the park across the street and smoke or shoot up. Our collective eyes were crazed burnt red. And numb, it was pretty easy to get shit done. I liked making the tuna (one pouch frozen pink fish to two pouches mayonnaise). Kneading it in a giant bowl with loose latex gloves, bits of tuna wormed their way between my fingers and my hands would freeze and tingle; there was something satisfying in all that coagulation. Being surrounded by all that waste: it was like death, like a mortuary. The same old fat couple would come in each morning for \$2.99 sausage and egg sandwiches with two senior discounts. They'd buy one cup of coffee and split it between them, stealing refills. Like I gave a fuck. We are all poor; we were all being poisoned. This was during Subway's "Healthy Choice" marketing blitz, proclaimed on giant green posters everywhere with air-brushed pictures of "Fresh Veggies". The managers pasted the posters over the windows so we couldn't even see the fucking sunlight.

Inside, the light was neon-green mixed with fluorescence, cool sterile air. It was like swimming in chlorine, like lying in AstroTurf. We even had a drive-thru so giant SUV's would sit waiting for their food and pumping carbon monoxide in our tiny window. We stood there drenched in chemicals, drug or otherwise: I sucked down Diet Coke, popped pills, hands clenched, fingernails stretched tight. It was disgusting, this hypocrisy.

I used to see this guy I grew up with, he came in everyday and got a roast beef on white bread, extra

mayonnaise. He was a security guard or some other kind of fake cop and he just smirked at me in my uniform, itchy polyester robot shirt. When we were kids, he was crazy and his mom was a drunk and I would yell at him when he walked behind me home from school. Stay the fuck away from me, I would yell, and run fast through the apartment complex where the child molester lived and there were fliers in everyone's mailbox about it. Now he looked at me through the sneeze guard plastic with his fake cop authority and acne scars and gloated. Stay the fuck away from me, I thought. You don't even have a gun.

I wasn't eating that summer, strung out on tweak, and Precious smoked too, we had that in common. Sometimes I thought she might like me. She'd help me fill out the scratch lottery tickets everyone was obsessed with and bought with our meager tips. You could scan them at the store to see if you'd won anything before scratching off the flaky silver coating, but I thought it was cute she helped me. I didn't even want to talk to her; I'd die of boredom listening to her adolescent whining about that soft focus ex-girlfriend. I wanted to fuck her, bite those fat lips, peel off layers of binding and suck on her nipples, hear her cry out. I wanted my name scrawled on her chest in scratches. It was generic and raw, these fantasies, like every bad porn I'd ever seen. Tweak really makes you lose your imagination and I didn't have energy for seduction. But I wanted her bad. It coursed through me like the drugs. I imagined lightening running down my arms, electric shocks. She drove me crazy.

One night she invited me over to her apartment. It was really her sister's place, where she lived with her baby, but Precious slept on the couch all the time. She called me late, almost midnight, knowing I had to work the morning shift. It was the end of summer by this time, and I was growing real sick of her games, teasing me. My friends, too, were tired of this burnt-out obsession. But I went anyways, of course, because I was so fucking bored that summer and that night the wind was out strong blowing all the trash and leaves up in stiff twisters in the gutter.

Precious was watching her sister's kid, barely one year old with soft curls and she was bored, too. I walked the three blocks to her apartment complex slowly, dragging on my cigarette, trying to see stars and listening to the soft whooshing noise of the traffic on the freeway overpass up above. Our neighborhood was crisscrossed by the freeway, the railroad tracks, and the river, cutting it into irregular sections, alleyways bursting with blackberries and crabgrass.

It was so hot that summer, sticking to me, stealing my breath. Subway was always sterile and cool, so the regulation black pants we had to wear didn't bother me working. But on the walk home as I guzzled soda and chewed the insides of my cheeks, my teeth aching from the meth, rattling the ice in my

cup, I would melt in the sun, run from shadow to shadow just to escape the afternoon. But this night was perfect, stiff wind and high moon, so I smoked slowly and walked carefully around sleeping bums and their bottles, wishing I had a knife.

Her apartment complex was sketchy and loud. People yelled at each other, TVs blaring. A bottle shattered and I smelled chemicals. I called her on my cell phone because she never told me the apartment number. But she opened the door suddenly, the one right in front of me. I could see the baby crawling on brown shag carpeting inside. She eased into a crooked smile for me, leaning on the door, but her eyes were shifty. She was eating a mango, the juice was all over her hands, dripped down her chin.

"Whatcha doin' here?" she teased.

"Fuck you."

I pushed past her and knelt down to the baby. She laughed at me as I picked up her niece, rested her on my hip. The baby smelled like piss and formula. Precious took a meth pipe to her mouth, lit the bowl, inhaled slowly as it sizzled. I imagined her sticky fingertips on the hot glass, caramelized. Her eyes sparkled, and I could almost see her veins tremble. I bit my lip hard as Precious exhaled and I held the baby even tighter, pressing her face into my neck to shield her from the fumes. I wanted it bad: I wanted the smoke in my lungs, to feel a jolt like my heart had just begun to beat, just now. And I wanted her to kiss me.

I put the baby down by the couch and turned back to watch Precious smoke more: her hat cocked down over one eye, baggy T-shirt low past her crotch, half tucked into sagging jeans. Smoke like ice curled up out of those fat delicious lips and it was then she grabbed my wrist and kissed me hard. I inhaled her breath, sucking the tweak smoke out, greedy. She kissed me because fireworks were bursting inside her hands and her sternum begged to slam itself against something and her teeth needed to grind onto each other, eroding. She kissed me as the pipe cooled and the glass turned her mango sugar fingertips to hard candy. Her eyes squeezed tight, crying air. I bit her fat lips just like I wanted and she whimpered, pulled back. She hated me, wanted her ex, wanted her mother, glared at me and scowled. I yanked the pipe away, smoked the remainder, until I felt my fingertips explode, until my bones shook. The baby found the mango pit and sucked on it; she was teething. And then nothing had ever seemed so low.

The air was speeding up around us, too loud in my ears and I needed to break a window somewhere. Precious sat down next to her niece on the floor, let the baby grab onto her finger and stared at me sad. Her eyes looked like gravel chips and she hated me. Inside our bones there was nothing, no marrow, no blood, just hollow like a bird's. We were crows pecking at the cement, pecking for bits of meat and trash.

I stood and watched them, the baby sucking on the mango pit and holding onto her fingers in a family tableau and I had nothing. I opened the door, let the screaming noise in, and walked away. The night was not dark enough to press down on me heavy like I needed. It was too warm around me, like the breeze

was afraid of my skin, avoiding the toxicity. Precious yelled at me from inside, she wanted me to call her later. I lit a cigarette and the air in it was better and it ripped into my lungs. She was so young; it was disgusting how I wanted her. ■

"Precious" is a startlingly good short story that covers a lot of ground in a short space. It is a gritty tale of longing amplified by drugs and humidity. It has a strong, harsh narrative voice, and vivid urban settings almost casually brought to life through the seemingly offhand detail. But most impressive of all is its mood, its compelling evocation of hectic longing and bleak frustration. **Robert Glück and Sarah Waters, Judges, Chroma International Queer Writing Competition, 2008.**

14

William Reichard Internal Memo

The sun turns sand to glass, my eyes to less than flesh,
so I am blind like my grandfather before me,

who was trapped in an America he didn't recognize,
confined to a bed in a bleak Nebraska nursing home.

If I could, I would love you, though my heart is ash,
burned, as it was, when I was too naive to know

how to protect it. No blood flows there.
You need to be safely shielded from me, and I,

from myself. None of us is safe these days.
There's a bomb or a plane or a maniac

for each of us; strange, avenging angels
who follow us our whole lives, and when

we need them least, they swoop in and take us out.
I've seen this, so I can warn you, at least.

I owe you that much. I'm not your angel.
I don't believe in vengeance. We all know best

how to hurt ourselves. The injuries we cause to others,
unplanned casualties, mislabeled *accidents*.



SUMMER '07: I was asked to write a libretto for the royal opera house in Covent Garden. When I received the email I was in the offices of Spiked!, an online publication that specialises in arguing with mainstream propaganda, where I was quickly discovering that I am a



I romanticise, but do not understand, the discipline of reporting. My internship with Spiked took place during a particularly hot spell between march and may - and I would sit there, baffled by the notion of finding good, first hand material and **FORMING AN OPINION** within twenty-four hours.

I still have this problem. The reporter's notebook they gave me remained empty.

The HACK LIBRETTIST'S checklist.*



Plane tickets!

Ennui

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

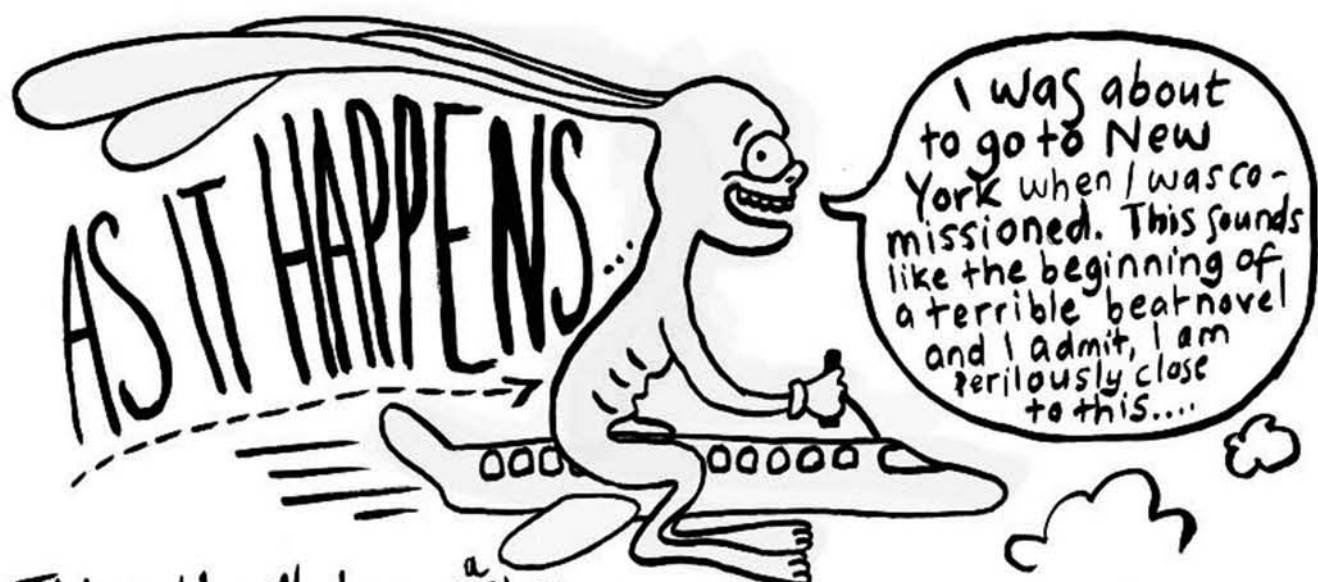
LUCK



UNNECESSARILY ORNATE CUPCAKES
New York style

* TALENT AND EXPERIENCE NOT REQUIRED.

MANDAY 17TH APRIL

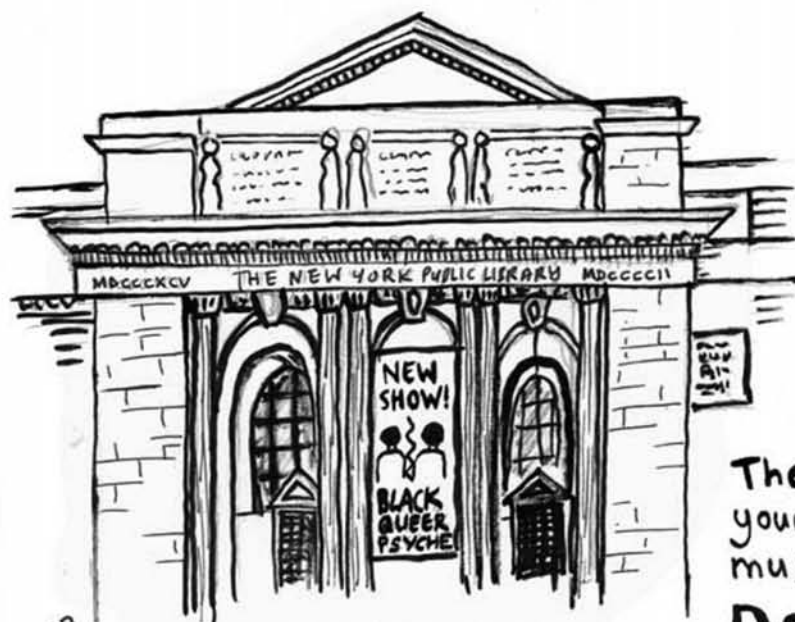


This could easily become a story of fear and loathing; peyote; patchouli; beef jerky and Sex Ed. But my experience of writing the libretto was a micro version of the inexperience I felt in macro. I didn't know anyone in New York. I had no plan, no money, no friends. I was underage, skinny and clueless.

And I knew NOTHING about opera. I bought 'The Rake's Progress' by Stravinsky and thought it was unbearable. I'd never even BEEN to the Royal Opera House. I had no clue about writing lyrics, about composition or the various names for different parts like "Arias." I'd just about been to the theatre.



IN The Same way, I had no choice but to MAKE my time in N.Y work for me. So from the station, I took the G-Train up to Lorimer street, then switched to the L-Train to Union Square. From there it was the 4, 5 or 6 to Grand Central, then out in the yellow and black heat to: *The New York public library!*



OUR PARTICULAR OPERA WAS A RE-WRITE OF "THE RAKE'S PROGRESS", UPDATED & RE-LOCATED TO THE CARIBBEAN, & FEATURING SLIMY CHARACTERS FROM THE UNDERWORLD

Like all beautiful reading rooms the beauty, the intricacy and the elegance are CONDUCTIVE to creative thought. Those sickening cherubs and placid scholars on the ceiling Impel the reeling off of many pages; The gold and the fake sky are not purely decorative, but functional—

They're frilly, quivering blueprints for your own imagination, at least when you must write a duet between the

DOOMED PROTAGONIST & DEATH INCARNATE

I STARTED TO GET OVER MY PROBLEM OF WRITING QUICKLY, CREATIVELY & TO A DEADLINE. SINCE THERE WERE NO FACTS INVOLVED...



IT WAS SIMPLY DOWN TO ME TO EVOKE AS MAGICALLY AS I COULD THE RAKE'S DESCENT INTO MADNESS. I WAS LONELY A LOT OF THE TIME AND THIS HELPED.



I MAILED THE FINISHED PRODUCT BACK TO LONDON AROUND THE END OF JUNE. I CONFESS, IT WAS NOT BRILLIANT AND THE R.O.H DIDN'T TAKE THE PROJECT FURTHER...

BUT FUCK IT. I WAS NINETEEN.



All that drafting and re-drafting, fretting, dotting and worrying paid off and I have since worked on other things. Not long ago, I saw the posters for another version of The Rake's Progress that the R.O.H commissioned. I'm not bitter. I'm a believer in luck, and sincerely going

for it, even if you HAVEN'T GOT A CLUE.

Scrunched up versions of many projects since.

Collected Woe

Astrid H. Roemer

an extract from *Looks Like Love*
Translated from the Dutch by Susan Massotty

Exactly as they had agreed, Cor Crommeling called at 9am on Saturday to say that his wife would be delighted to invite “an old acquaintance like Cora Sewa” to lunch.

She could still taste the car trip, and her knees were shaking as she promised to have a taxi bring her to their address at 2 o'clock that afternoon. She asked if anyone else would be present besides herself, Crommeling and his wife.

“Of course not!” Crommeling exclaimed.

She could hear the edginess in his voice. He was prepared to go to great lengths for Cora Sewa. She felt that when he had taken her hand, helped her out of the car, walked her to the door of Room 614, nodded, and left without a word.

She was also prepared. She had spent hours by the ocean and the pelicans, soaking up the beauty.

She had felt like praying, but didn't know what to ask for. Besides, who or what should she address her murmurs to?

The ocean commanded silence. But a Bible in a bedside drawer with stories about a God who didn't want to show himself was of little interest to her.

It occurred to her that she could screw together the three pieces of her walking stick and take it with her. She would surely need help. Something to hold onto. Something to give her support!

And so she found herself in a mouse-grey pantsuit with a walking stick leaving the Oceanside Holiday Inn in a limousine-sized American car.

She had paid more attention to her appearance than usual. Not that she'd used make-up, mind you; she'd braided her kinky hair into two fat braids and draped them around her head like a reclining reptile; she'd pinned her mother's brooch to her jacket; she'd sprayed herself with her favourite cologne.

After the room had been given its daily cleaning, which she'd asked to be done earlier than usual, she left a note on the bed with Crommeling's address. For Michael Mus. In case something happened to her. Or maybe she just wanted to neutralise her own fears.

The taxi pulled up to a house in a nice residential area, and Crommeling came towards her waving. He

pulled his wallet out of his inside pocket, helped her out of the car and exchanged a few words with the driver.

Had she heard Crommeling tell the man that he was expected at that address again at 7pm?

Dora Crommeling was a wreck of her former self. Although time had left its mark, the woman who came towards her was an affectionate version of the one she had known in Paramaribo.

“Welcome, Cora.”

“Good afternoon, Mrs. Crommeling.”

And so it went. According to her husband, his wife had spent hours practicing those two words: Welcome, Cora! They had left her lips without a single error. And the smile that had framed the victory was also intended to camouflage the events of the past.

But did Dora Crommeling, née Van Aalst, have her own past?

According to her daughter she did; it's just that Mommy was unable to tell her side of it. Dora Crommeling could no longer invent herself.

Ever since Cor Crommeling had beat his wife so hard that she had ended up in hospital, she had been trapped in her own stories. Still, it's no wonder “Dad” exploded when he heard the lies his wife had told to get him his diplomatic post.

She watched how he talked to his wife: careful and attentive. His wife might not have any words at her command, but her body was with him all the way.

A lovely tea table was set with tamarind tea, and they drank out of porcelain cups that were as light as the start to their afternoon. They ate tiny tamarind cookies that Dora Crommeling had made herself. When her husband praised her culinary efforts, she nodded in satisfaction and stretched out her hand to brush her fingertips across his chin.

After a while she was given a grand tour by the lady of the house herself. It was strange to walk behind “Miz Crommeling” and hear her own voice say, “It's very nice, it's beautiful. I'd recognise that silver plate with the ‘God loves a sinner’ motto anywhere. Oh, look, a painting of your green house in Paramaribo!”

Sometimes Mrs Crommeling had to laugh. But

even then she hardly made a sound. For the last fifteen years Dora Crommeling had been unable to speak.

Cor Crommeling popped up at the end of the tour and took her to the terrace so his wife could slip off to the kitchen.

She had planted grapes. And Madame Jeanette peppers. And *jungle flame*. Sturdy plants. "And other things that give Dora a lot of pleasure." The swimming pool had been empty, ever since the grandkids had gotten so big that "they could reach out their arms and touch the sides." Cor Crommeling had his own brand of humour.

His wife's appearance in the doorway signalled that lunch was ready. With almost childish delight, she followed the Crommelings to the dining room. It smelled delicious. A familiar odour. Baked bread. Steamed rice.

She was seated across from the husband and wife. The table had been decorated. Vases had been filled with fresh flowers.

Was he the one who lifted up the lid of the soup tureen?

She stared at the creamy green split-pea soup. She could feel the tears rolling down her cheeks. She could hear Dora Crommeling's sobs.

Had she been so hurt all those years ago that she couldn't even bring herself to grasp Dora Crommeling's outstretched hand?

It seemed that Delia's cough had not been just a way to express her conflict with her mother. Crommeling's daughter had been "knocked up" by her Javanese boyfriend, Asjoka.

She, Cora Sewa, née Dumfries, will never forget how that girl had fought to keep both her baby and her sweetheart. Asjoka's father had even come early one morning to ask officially on behalf of his son if Delia and Asjoka could get married.

The rejection was humiliating.

She, Cora Sewa, had relived part of her own past in those weeks. Except that in her case life had become a fairy tale. Delia Crommeling's had turned into a horror movie.

For several days Delia had been so afraid of her mother's reprisals that she had hidden in Cora and Herman's house. In the end, the police had advised Herman to send the girl back home. After that, things got so bad that Asjoka's parents had forbid their son to have anything to do with the Crommelings. Because Delia Crommeling would never be able to free herself of her background. Because marriage to her would be based on her mother's grief. Because their baby also had the right to be received with joy by both families.

Asjoka's mother had shown up on the doorstep with another Javanese woman. They had come to terminate the pregnancy by means of massage.

Delia Crommeling had probably been so hurt by

that visit that she had agreed to do whatever her parents said.

In the end it had been Herman who had done away with the fruits of the young romance. Of course she knew that, since it was all happening in the house where she was working. And yet for years Herman had tried to keep her from finding out about his involvement.

Why had she never asked herself what had become of the talented Asjoka?

Of course she offered to do the washing-up for the Crommelings, but they wouldn't even let her carry her cutlery to the dishwasher.

They wanted to spoil her for once. Or, at any rate, Mr Crommeling claimed he was speaking for the two of them.

Their guest had let it be known in a variety of ways that she had enjoyed the meal. She was, in fact, feeling full and well-fed. She had hoped that the meeting with the Crommelings would be the high point of her journey, and the lunch had confirmed that.

"Did you forget that we had a bone to pick?" she asked.

Mr and Mrs Crommeling stiffened slightly and looked at her.

"An Andijk," mumbled Crommeling's wife without too much difficulty.

She was startled. She wasn't clever enough for these people! She had let them box her in with their sweet talk! She had lost sight of her own interests!

Blaming herself, she walked outside. She needed fresh air.

The Crommelings left her alone for a good fifteen minutes. In that time she was able to separate what was so hard to separate: the past and the present.

It was Mrs Crommeling who motioned for her to come inside. It was time to settle the An Andijk question once and for all.

In a kind of panic, she asked for her walking stick. The Crommelings looked up in surprise. Cora Sewa with a fancy walking stick in their living room? Shy but determined, she remarked that "plantation folks had their little quirks, even far away from home." But Cor Crommeling was unable to leave it at that. The walking stick must belong to Herman, he said, and he had gotten to know the Sewas as a couple who did everything together. And so with their permission she lay the walking stick down on the Persian carpet, within arm's reach, and waited for the onslaught.

"My wife's speech problem is directly related to the murder of An Andijk."

The meeting had been opened. They were sitting in a triangle, several feet away from each other. A nearby copper trolley held hot and cold drinks, cups and glasses. Bach organ music was playing in the background. A huge menorah gave off artificial light – sevenfold.

They had agreed that he would give his account, that she could interrupt, that he and his wife would be as open as they could be; after all, they were three “old people” who had little left to look for in life except honesty. Besides, they had the opportunity just before Christmas, just before the turn of the century, to clear their consciences. Or as Cor Crommeling put it, they could begin their own tribunal right here in his living room. As long as it was understood that each of them were to play all the roles: victim, perpetrator, prosecutor, defence, witness, jury, judge.

Though she and Mrs Crommeling didn’t nod, they knew he was right: they were condemned to each other for life.

After his wife had been discharged from the hospital, Cor Crommeling had been faced with the fact that she would have to learn to talk all over again.

Not that he’d hit her so hard that the nerves had been damaged – there was no medical evidence of that. Mrs Crommeling had suffered mentally from his blows. The speech therapists soon came to the same conclusion: Mrs Crommeling no longer felt like talking.

As soon as Leonard Crommeling heard about his mother’s speech problem, he flew to Washington. He demanded that his father say farewell to his diplomatic career and move somewhere that would be good for his mother. Since she didn’t want to go back to Holland or Suriname, they decided on Florida. The Crommelings had enjoyed many vacations there.

But what did that have to do with An Andijk?

Dora Crommeling had known for years that her husband was having an affair with his secretary. It didn’t take her long to realise that this time it wasn’t a case of nostalgia, of her husband’s desire to catch up on life in Suriname. Dora Crommeling knew that her husband loved An Andijk as he had never loved anyone before. Her shock, fear, pain and shame grew into hate. The humiliations her mother had subjected her to in her childhood began to haunt her and disrupt her everyday life. Her mother was beyond the reach of her revenge, but Dora Crommeling wasn’t about to let an illegitimate planter’s daughter torment her for the rest of her days.

Had An Andijk been tormenting Dora Crommeling, then?

Crommeling realised too late that when a “battered child” grows up it becomes a “time bomb” in a relationship. Crommeling had no way of knowing that the attentions he paid his mistress would send his wife into a tailspin, that she would revert to a little girl who lacked a mother’s love. Crommeling failed to understand that his wife’s episodes of jealousy were a warning to him to end his affair. How could Cor Crommeling have known that his working hours, his meetings, his office work, his business trips and even his aftershave were lashes across the back of his lawfully-wedded wife? How could Cor Crommeling have known that his wife looked upon An Andijk’s presence in their lives as

the source of all tension in their family?

And then An Andijk became pregnant.

Dora Crommeling was one of the first to know about her husband’s “love child.” An Andijk’s doctor, violating the doctor-patient privilege, told her as soon as the test results were in. After all, they were both Dutch, both Rotterdammers. He informed Dora Crommeling, née Van Aalst, that her “wayward” husband’s “little floozy” was planning to keep the baby. An Andijk was delighted she was pregnant.

In fact, Delia had moved away from home the year before that; a Hindustani cleaning lady had taken Cora Sewa’s place after she’d quit.

In fact, Cor Crommeling only came home in the mornings just before daylight to wash and change into his work clothes; he had had to admit, he “simply” couldn’t bear his wife and his son.

In fact, he had loved An Andijk with all his heart and soul. He’d been incredibly happy to think she was carrying his baby.

How could it ever have come to murder?

Dora Crommeling stood up to switch on the chandelier and leave the room for some unknown reason. As soon as his wife was out of sight, Cor Crommeling came over, squatted down beside her and whispered, “What comes next is the hardest part for my wife. Don’t forget that she acted out of love. My wife was trying to save her family!”

She kept her eyes focused on the chandelier. All those pastel-coloured crystals were fascinating. Artificial light and crystal went well together. They were like rainbows. She soaked up the beauty, armed herself for what lay ahead.

Sighing, Dora Crommeling sat down on a low chair with a footstool. She gazed at her former housekeeper with a look of helplessness; still, she nodded at her husband to continue.

“How it could have come to the murder of An Andijk?” Crommeling boldly resumed speaking. “My wife did at least ‘three things’ to force a break between An Andijk and me. She sent An threatening letters. She made the rounds of politicians in the hope of getting me out of the country. And she found herself an accomplice.”

“An accomplice?” she snapped while staring at Dora Crommeling with wide-open eyes. “Now you’re telling me an accomplice killed An Andijk?”

Cor Crommeling made a shushing sound. “Not so fast, Miss Cora. Let’s take the time to understand the events leading up to the murder. Today, for the second and last time in my life, I’m going to talk about what happened. I don’t want to leave anything out.” And he stood up to turn on the Bach record again.

Dora Crommeling had bombarded her husband’s mistress with anonymous letters, but they’d had little effect since Cor Crommeling had torn most of them

up unread. To An Andijk he swore that the mother of his children wouldn't stoop to blackmail, but at home his attitude went from chilly and cold to a deadly freeze. His refusal to talk about his secretary drove his wife to desperation. Although it was despicable of Dora Crommeling to spread lies about her daughter Delia, she was eventually able to reap the benefits. An's pregnancy, however, was the last straw. The switchboard operator had apparently once told Dora Crommeling that An Andijk frequently had long conversations with a man named Onno Sewa.

"But Onno Sewa was murdered as well. Maybe by the same person who killed An Andijk." She was so upset that she grabbed the walking stick, placed it across her lap and held it tightly with both hands.

"Onno Sewa was your brother-in-law. We know that. As far as I'm concerned, Miss Cora, we can stop this interrogation right now, to spare you and your husband. My wife and I agreed to rake up the past because we owe you – and Herman – a lot. But if..."

"No, go on. Go on," was all she was prepared to say. She was as nervous as a deer with a pack of hunters at its heels.

Dora Crommeling set off to find out all she could about Onno Sewa. She had never been involved with the "Dutch clique" in Paramaribo, but she had good connections. So she was able to get the priests at Onno Sewa's former boarding school to tell her his life story. They even gave her the names of his father and mother and showed her the documents that were kept in the monastery safe. Onno Sewa himself was only supposed to see them in the year 2007, exactly one hundred years after his father's birth. At that time Onno Sewa would find out that he was a millionaire: Da Silva had left him all he owned.

"Did Onno Sewa kill An Andijk?"

"On that fateful day my wife invited Onno Sewa to her home, supposedly for business. She told him she wanted his advice on a sports car, or some such thing. He arrived at our house an hour late. I wasn't home. Neither was Leonard. They started off talking about cars, but then the conversation took a more personal turn. For all I know Dora tried to seduce him so she could get on more intimate terms with him."

Crommeling looked in his wife's direction as he uttered this last sentence. Dora Crommeling raised her eyebrows, pursed her lips, and shook her head.

That, too, had been agreed upon in advance. That Mrs Crommeling would be "totally involved" in the conversation and use whatever means she could to express "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

Anyway, once they'd "gotten a little closer," she'd had no trouble bringing up An Andijk. She gathered that Onno Sewa longed for no one else but An. And once again Dora Crommeling had found it necessary to resort to fabrication: she told Onno Sewa that An Andijk wanted to have nothing to do with him, that she

was ashamed of his background. And that at the office and the Country Club she had poked fun at the man who was head over heels in love with her. Onno Sewa had been hurt to the quick. His eyes had turned red, and he had barely been able to talk. "My background?" he kept mumbling. "What do you mean 'my background'?"

"Once my wife discovered the wound in your brother-in-law's innermost soul, she didn't hesitate to rub salt in it. My God, Miss Cora, it shames me to this day. I can hardly bring myself to talk about it!"

The only sound in the room was the organ music. She could hum every note. She'd heard the record almost every day for seven years. The Crommelings had never listened to the morning news, just to Bach. The same record, day after day. She'd eventually worked out the name: *Soli Deo Gloria*. Daughter Delia had explained that it was a chorale Bach had composed for the church organ as an expression of his love of God. She began to like the chorales, and missed them when she stopped going to the Crommelings.

Cor Crommeling was holding his head in his hands. His wife was watching him. And just as she had years ago, she was sitting with her hands in her lap, filled with despair.

I don't feel a thing anymore, she thought. I'm numb to the pain; I can't think ahead and I can't think back; I'm caught in a "now" that has nothing to do with the "present."

"Who murdered An Andijk?"

Actually, she had only been thinking out loud. But Cor Crommeling interpreted it as a signal to pick up the thread of his narrative. He lifted his head and looked, not at Cora Sewa, but at Dora Crommeling as he delivered his latest confession: "An Andijk was murdered by Cor Crommeling and Dora Crommeling!"

"No!" she exclaimed in horror.

Crommeling rose to his feet and went over to stand behind the chair in which his wife was sitting with her feet up. He even leaned over to drape his arms around her shoulders, then quoted Faust: "*Mich fasst ein längst entwohnter Schauer; Der Menschheit ganzer Jammer fasst mich an. Hier wohnt sie, hinter dieser feuchten Mauer; Und ihr Verbrechen war ein guter Wahn!*"

His words fell like drops of water from a tightly closed tap. It seemed as if the silence would never end.

"I don't understand you!" she exclaimed, trying to keep the panic out of her voice.

The smile around Crommeling's lips turned into a grimace, the fingers stroking his wife's shoulders tightened into claws, his voice sounded as unnatural as a ventriloquist's. "The two of us tore An Andijk to shreds, and all because of our 'hunger' for honesty."

"Did you actually rip open her stomach? Kill her child?!"

"Onno Sewa did that for us, Miss Cora..."

She ran out of the Crommeling's living room, fled outside, walking stick and all. But Cor Crommeling

and Dora Crommeling were right behind her. His words were full of emotion but clearly articulated, "And now we'll follow you until you've heard every last note of our tragedy."

"Onno Sewa wasn't a murderer!" she protested.

"Miss Cora, you haven't heard me say he was. At any rate, not if you've been listening carefully!"

And before she could utter a word of protest, Crommeling took her right arm, and his wife took her left arm. The walking stick clattered to the ground, and they led her back to her chair in the living room. It was true, they were condemned to each other for life; she herself had set the proceedings in motion. She wanted to keep one step ahead of them, so she gathered her courage and said, "Now I suppose you're going to tell me that Onno Sewa was responsible for his own murder?"

Cor Crommeling took a deep breath. "We'll never know what happened between Sewa and An in the house on Surinderstraat. I don't want to speculate. I loved An Andijk too much for that."

"But how do you know that he did it, then?"

"The police hadn't arrived yet when I found An's body lying in the kitchen. Her mother had run outside screaming, and a neighbour had immediately called me at work. I was in the middle of a meeting. It took me about ten minutes to get there. People. People everywhere. All clustered around the gate. I unlocked the front door and went towards the kitchen. 'Anneke,' I called, 'Anneke.' I could smell the odour of crime. Saw her lying there. Blood all over. And the rest. You know what it was like. I called her name, as if I could bring her back. Her face, like she was sleeping. I'd seen that face so often in the mornings, before I'd leave for home. Suddenly, my eye caught the murder weapon. My own pruning shears. Covered in her blood.

My first thought was: Dora has taken revenge. I shoved the shears under my shirt, against my stomach, and walked outside. I sent someone to fetch you from Plantation Jericho and called the police. Then I went back to sit by An so I could imprint all the details on my memory. I thought about the diplomatic appointment I was supposedly applying for. I knew I couldn't go on living in Paramaribo, so I decided there and then to take the job in the States. I'd divorce my wife and live alone with my memories of An. And our child. I think I was able to see its gender, though I may be mistaken. After all, my life has been one big mistake after another."

She was becoming impatient. She wanted facts. Crommeling ought to keep his feelings to himself. She asked in some irritation, "And when you got home, Mrs Crommeling told you that Onno Sewa had gone to An Andijk's to rip open her belly with the pruning shears?"

"You may not know it, but when Onno Sewa was found dead on the street, I'd been at my post in Washington D.C. for two weeks. My wife and my son

were still in Paramaribo dealing with the house and the move. I was shocked at the news."

"Did you ever speak to him about the murder of...?"

Cor Crommeling had gone to Onno Sewa's house. Onno Sewa was busy repairing cars.

"All of a sudden I appeared in front of him with the pruning shears in my hand. Seven days after An's murder. Six days after my wife supposedly confessed all she knew. Her only alibi was her story about her conversation with Onno Sewa, which seemed plausible. I ordered him to leave the country within a month. If he stayed, I'd see to it that he was thrown into Santo Boma for the rest of his life."

"What happened then?"

"He didn't move a muscle. He was sitting on a marble bench of some kind. I waited. And waited. Then he muttered, very slowly, 'You're about to have another murder on your hands.'"

I answered, "If you so much as lay a finger on my wife, my daughter or my son, I'll slit your throat myself."

Mrs Crommeling didn't make a sound. It was as if Crommeling had slit her throat; she'd put her hand around her neck.

Exactly at that moment, the doorbell rang. Loud and long. She thought it was the cab driver; Crommeling looked at his watch. His wife looked at him in shock. Another buzz of the doorbell. Longer.

"It's Michael Mus."

She'd said the words without thinking. The Crommelings both sat up and exclaimed at the same time: "MM?!"

The panic on their faces was awful to see. She tried to explain quickly that Michael Mus had come especially for her, that she had no intention of discussing what the three of them had been talking about with anyone else, that she really wasn't out to disrupt their lives, but she couldn't find the right words. When they still made no move to answer the door, she said, "Michael Mus doesn't even know the reason I'm here!"

The bell rang again. Without stopping.

She jumped up and exclaimed with almost child-like openness, "The Reverend likes to have a good time. Why don't we turn this into a kind of Surinamese get-together? I'll help with the cooking and whatever..."

And lo and behold, Cor Crommeling ran to the front door. She and Mrs Crommeling heard the sound of two male voices, laughing heartily.

"Should I go back to my hotel right now and take MM with me?"

The woman shook her head.

"Do you want us to stay?"

The woman nodded, smiled.

"Maybe you and I should go to the kitchen?"

Mrs Crommeling came towards her and placed

her hands on her guest's cheeks. It was the first time they had stood so close together. Eye to eye. And completely relaxed. Herman was right: even poison can be used to heal if it's administered properly.

The men came over, talking a mile a minute.

"Well, look who's here... the women!" MM exclaimed enthusiastically, and came over to give her a hug. But she took a few steps back and said in mock dismay, "I thought you were going to bring me my husband."

They all laughed at the Reverend's surprised face and his "I'm afraid you'll have to make do with Michael Mus and Cor Crommeling tonight, ladies. We have our occasional lapses, but we're not so bad, are we?" Chuckling, he walked over to Crommeling's wife and clasped her hand in both of his.

The atmosphere had lightened considerably, but

she could see MM trying to gauge her mood.

"Everything okay?" he asked softly when he was standing beside her.

She nodded. "I can hardly believe I'm leaving tomorrow afternoon."

A silence fell. The kind that occurs when people realise this might be the last time they'll ever see one another. They looked at each other in a daze. As if they were only now beginning to give any thought to this encounter, so long after their lives in Paramaribo. Michael Mus in his white suit was searching helplessly for words. Like Hansel, unable to find the trail of bread he'd left behind. In fact, they all seemed to have wandered towards this moment by accident. ■

Merry Gangemi Laundry Day

after reading Emily Dickinson

23

Clothes flap on the line,
and a moth tickles
the grass. Sunlight is deep
everywhere, deep into the trees,
into the mossy crevices of the stone wall.

I am in my mind, and it is
an exquisite honor.

Light floods the woodshed
with something crystalline, sparkling
green and dandelion yellow.

I think of Dickinson and her
narrow fellow in the grass,
the flick disappearing into green,
wisdom in the dirt.
Light snakes deep

into everything inert.
I need to know what the snake
is all about—
its slimness sliding into
the awful eye of Zero,

the trap of expectation,
the uncertain strength of bone.

Catherine McNeil

em sees a woman

em can not bend her legs. tires protrude beneath her bus seat.
she tires of the same old super happy boppy poppy loco tunes blaring

on the buses in San Miguel. hums her dirty little ditty in her hot-wired head:

*o cutie pie, apple of my eye
wrap your legs round my waiting thigh
gonna sex your cherry, gonna wanna marry
my cutie pie*

blossoms periwinkling from jacaranda outside the bus window
float by em's float-by eyes down, down and scattered, on Calle Salida.

someone has turned on the sun. clouds. swallows. the sky so azure sure.
pearl of sweat on em's nose. she pours water into her left palm. tosses

it onto her right shoulder, right palm, left shoulder. water drips from her neck
down her spine, from manibrium into lapyrscopic scars in her belly

button, pools over her pancake belly bowl, down the thin line of fine black
hair gathering at the edge of panties, cooling her crotch. trickles through her

ordinary body of joy. the bus rests across from Farmacia Guadalajara. there
under the palm, em sees a woman in jean cut offs, Burks, a Michigan

Woman's Music Festival tank top, sexy shades, rosy cheeks, dark eyebrows,
silver hoop in nose, tanned slender body of around fifty, ball cap with a

rainbow sign, short blonde hair, she's gotta be a dyke. the woman glances,
looks around, bends her head down again, scribbles something. another writer?

bolsa of garbanzos con chili y limon at the her side. the bus driver lodges his engine.

Catherine McNeil

hear the wind

em dreams wanted food particles swim into her bloodstream
poems fall out of her ears, the one about meeting Wonderwoman

in The Louvre. liz returns to em for the first time in Vancouver's
West End. liz's body fits into em's, her naked behind tucked into

em's pancake stomach, liz's arm draped over her belly, liz needs
em to continue being so wonderful. groggy groggy. this sun-keen

morning, em awakens with a "where am i?" debussy's *afternoon
of a fawn* in earreach. "oh i just feel like chirping" as if the

swallows outside the bedroom window wanted a contralto:

*love is patient, love is kind
love is a cup of coffee on time*

liz on the lip of the bed hands em a steaming latte, sticks her finger
in it as she inimitably does, places a smackeroo, top of her noggin

"ooh your hair smells like hair" "you think you can get away
with anything when i laugh at you." em with the kind kind of eyes

that hug, takes everything in clearly in one glance, through her new
tri-focals, draws liz's lips towards her. "take my tongue anytime,

then i'll be speechless." crawls onto the bed, the two kiss their sweet
lives hello, between ebullient banjo blues, between syllables and thighs

phosphorescent rings pulse in third eyes. oo la la. goodness will surely
follow them all of their lives. let us give thanks. "my love she lays me

down on Sto:lo land." every move on earth a prayer, and a struggle.
freighters aground in Stanley Park. six year old girl with a padded bra

a Davie Street strumpet. homeless girl in a sleeping bag at the busstop
at Burrard and Davie covers her face with cardboard, pigeonscream

under wheels on Nelson. still em expects something good to happen.
her tongue untied. no worries at all at all. noone follows anyone.

mechanical tin cans don't crash into each other to feel. no crackups
since she began showing liz her world. on the good red road, she

boogies over bridges, laughs good-bye to gephyrophobic days, no
scamps with cams on her tail. as her plump heart pumps, the ear

empties. "if i put my ears against yours, will i hear the wind again?"

26



Two Sides of the Boy

Phillip Tang

"I cry every time."

"Every time?"

"Yes."

"Even when you're ecstatic?"

"Yeah."

"Even if you're with a man?"

He smudges a hand across his damp eyes and looks around before whispering, "No, maybe not with a man." On the word man, his eyes are vivid with the white light I've seen in kleptomaniacs and priests.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Stop talking. Of course." He starts shaking and rubbing his palms on his jeans so hard he might take the blue off.

"Are you scared?"

"No, it's my back-to-front emotions again. I'm excited. I've got nothing to lose."

We march through the door of the Knave of Clubs with one of us with nothing to lose. Black might not seem like a colour to most, but as we make our entrance, our black hair radiates like polished worry beads.

"Two beers, please, sir." Hiep says.

He's too polite. I don't want to apologise for being here.

The barman doesn't understand. Hiep's Vietnamese clips and swallows are too much for him and he reacts with a relay of looks around the room. I follow with my eyes and it occurs to me that these—men—are—all—homosexuals: three fellows with moustaches against the wall, two skinny boys in flares wiggling against the pool table, a group of grandfathers with shaved heads.

Hiep starts laughing. First it's just a cough of the stuff. Then it's like the sound of water hitting chip-fat. All eyes are blunt on us.

The barman tilts his head at me, as if I am shorter than him.

"Two beers."

Hiep and I take our drinks to the corner where the dark is thickest, to shade our teensy-weensy Oriental eyes.

"Stop laughing," I say through my teeth.

"I told you," he says. "They come out topsy-turvy."

Hiep says these words in English to show me he

can be understood. He has only been here six months. He tells me he started somewhere rural called Worse-Than-Being-in-Viet-Nam-on-Trent. He ran away and lives in a derelict factory behind Kingsland Road with skinny pigeons.

"It's fine. All fine. Drink your beer and it'll all be fine."

"This is fantastic," he says, but scrunches his big body into a boulder.

I don't know how to read his mangled emotions; I don't know if when we met he enjoyed it, or if he just likes my bed because there's no pigeon shit.

We drink our beers and then have another. It only takes two pints for us to flush red but I don't care anymore. One of the grandfathers starts talking and laughing loudly, turning to us as if we were part of the conversation.

"Well, who cares about Rock anyhow? I prefer my boys sweeter."

He twirls the air like a Vietnamese opera singer. I wonder if he'll get up to sing, and as if reading my mind, he stands and staggers towards us. The carpet between us is worn bare and stretches on forever as he walks over. I would prefer not to see his old face. I would prefer to be in a cinema in Sai Gon. Fumbly, hands and mouths accidentally against each other, like Marmite in the margarine. He looks like Mr Blind-in-One-Eye who comes into the chip shop and orders fish with tomato sauce.

I turn to Hiep for guidance. He is taller and more muscular than me and we all look to these people for help when we're in trouble. But Hiep is frowning at the grandfather so I know inside he must be jumping up and down like a whore on a banker's bed.

"Can I sit down?"

"Yet, o'course," Hiep says with his accent cutting into the words.

I don't believe the grandfather's Queen Elizabeth politeness. He has his hands piously clasped on the Formica table before Hiep even finishes speaking. Then comes the question. The one that lets me bodyshift into his eyes for a second.

"Where are you from?"

I blush, and through the grandfather's eyes I now look twice as drunk and like a child. Hiep blushes too, but his voice is clear and steady through the grandfather's blue cigarette smoke.

"Viet Nam. You know?"

"*Naturellement. Naturellement.* And how did you get here?"

"Airplay."

"An aeroplane? Indeed? All that way from Vietnam? Not a boat?"

"No, from Hong Kong. No boat."

"What about from Vietnam to Hong Kong? A boat?"

"Yet. Yet. Very-very small boat."

"Well, you are very handsome. Do you understand?"

All three of us are struck by a Star Trek freeze ray. Men are singing along to *Last Dance* from a back room we haven't seen yet. I wonder if my eyes will get to see it or if they will dry up into scotched eggs from not blinking.

The grandfather doesn't blink at Hiep either. He sees: half exotic tiger and half boxer. Which half depends on whether the grandfather looks up or down. Hiep's thick throat swallows the moment.

"Well, nice to meet you both. I have a show to perform, but I'll come see you after. What were your names?"

"Hiep."

"*Enchanté*, Hiep, I'm John. And you are?"

His hand is doughy and smells of talc and charity shops. He's wearing a gold ring. I say nothing. He doesn't want to know my name anyhow and his is obviously fake. He probably has a wife at home, too, though in the same country, in the same house.

Hiep chokes back tears for the next ten minutes. I am hypnotised by his welled-up eyes versus his thick chest. I can look at him and see the boy, then the man, then the boy. At that moment I realise that it is being able to see this that makes me homosexual.

"He's incredible, isn't he?" Hiep says.

"Who? The old man? Are you crazy?"

"You don't like him?"

"I don't even understand why we're here."

"Because you like men and you won't be able to when Linh comes."

"Be quiet. Don't say her name. She'll see this place if you call her name here."

"You'll have to choose." He's drunk. One side of his mouth pulls up, then the other.

"That man, that lover with moth-ball breath, you can do better."

"This isn't love. It's just a ladder. Labour camps, then Blah-on-blah, then London, and now this man."

"And me?"

His face is incandescent with emotions. He sways, trying to stumble upon the right face for his

feelings. "What? You have a wife."

I should just stand and go. I call Hiep my boyfriend in my mind, though the truth is, I only met him three-and-a-bit weeks ago. But who doesn't round up? I came to London for a ladder too, for me and Linh. But I could smell something else here from Hong Kong. Under-the-bridge deep breaths, hairy against smooth chests, urinal cakes.

I stand. There are no ties. My last "boyfriend" and I were as bright as aluminium foil, then gone. Fri Sat Sun.

Hiep drags me back down. I sit there and wait for him. His eyes blink like a strobe. He stands, shakes out his arms, drops to the chair again. He sobs quietly then pounds a fist on the table and our beers bleed across it; I order more and return. He fumbles for my thigh; I clasp his hands. He cackles, snorts, puzzles, gasps and goes cross-eyed while I make a show of sipping my drink. Finally, he's quiet.

The grandfather reappears, with makeup at the seams of his face. "Hip!"

Hiep stands to greet him and I walk out towards the unknowing eyes of Bethnal Green.

"Sorry," I say.

"Sorry," Hiep says without looking up.

That should be the end of it. The cold air in my flat has a ringing sound. But in the early morning, Hiep squeezes onto the mattress beside me and buries his warm limbs into mine. I'm aware that I should hold onto the feeling because in a moment the alarm clock will go off and it'll be over. I'll think back to him and he'll be blurry.

Later, after work, as I make my way back from Mr Greek's Chip Shop, I imagine Hiep on the bus from Mr Turkish's Clothes Factory, but when I get home the flat is empty.

A month later Linh arrives. She ends every day by writing numbers in a book and then kissing me on the forehead. She used to be a banker and before that a teacher, which in Viet Nam, like everywhere else, means watching the pennies.

She doesn't just bring soft skin and malty perfume, she carries the vegetable smell of Hong Kong and the pressure to earn more pounds an hour. And my blind spot to men: I turn them to my peripheral vision the way Linh does beggars. I no longer see men spilling onto Columbia Road on Sunday morning; I don't notice them when I take a piss at King's Cross Station.

But I do see somebody there one day. Months later. At the back of my mind I was probably waiting to see him, on his way to work. Flecks of brown catch in his eyes under the globes.

"Hiep."

"Oh, hello. Hi." He looks greyer. "That Vietnamese girl outside, is that Linh?"

"How are you?"

We talk about nothing and the icy weather. As if we've just met again here. His face is mute. He takes a long breath on a cigarette. Then I ask him about the grandfather. He starts laughing, cackling, as if he has held on till this moment to let it all out. He can't control his shaking and the cigarette slips into the urinal. He tells me through giggles that the grandfather was cruel but won't tell me how.

"The worst part was that he was just a pensioner," he says. "An empty-fisted old man."

Hiep has spent the last month hiding from him. He draws air to say something else but it won't come. I look to the door to where Linh is waiting. Every breath is timed.

"But also," Hiep bites his smile down. "He has seen where you work."

"I don't understand."

"The grandfather. He told me a woman meets you at the shop. That he could tell her about you, if I run."

I don't know what to say. Linh. I look to the curled corner-tiles of the wall. They look at me with silent sorrow that says they've not been able to help any of the other lives they've seen crumbling under this yellow light. Linh is waiting out there, monitoring the numbers on her watch. She counts out the day on that thing. A thing that knows about living. She knows how many times the hands will go round before she asks me to have a baby. It won't be a request.

"I've missed you," Hiep says.

I can hear the trains rumbling underneath us, taking away some other part of my life. Hiep is clinging to me as he drowns and I can't help but utter it.

"I miss you, too," I say.

He starts to whimper and my skin prickles. His fists grab my shoulders and we stumble into a cubicle. His eyes begin flickering. I close mine and everything has a blurry feeling. Then come hurried breaths. Then pleasure and we fly. We are high and light and young and we laugh and frown as easily as the air through us. I sense all his moods the exact moment they reach him and they come out the right way round. It feels like an hour of this. Finally we drift back down, our skin and hair glowing as we sway backwards. We are in the cubicle again. Toilet yellowed where it drips. We are lost for a moment. The place is no longer empty. There are men making their own decisions at the urinals. Hiep leans towards me and hesitates, but I pull him in for a hug — two boys standing in a box in our country but far away — and he starts to cry. So do I.

Linh's voice is yelling in Vietnamese, saying, "Are you there? It's been six minutes."

Hiep is still. All his energy is focused on drinking me in through his eyes, yet I'm being pulled towards the exit. I want him to instruct me what to do. I should know his feelings, though I look to him biting his lip and he is as familiar and distant to me as my childhood.

But he knows exactly what I'm thinking. "Have you ever lost something accidentally but on purpose?" he says with his lips tickling my ear. "Or held a glass and secretly hoped to drop it just to see it break?"

The floor is wet and its smell sharpens my mind. I've made my decision. I'm not doing it for him or her. I peer out towards the doorway by the men at the basins who dry and wash and dry their hands. Hiep is still waiting.

"Come here tomorrow," I tell him. "And every day."

I don't do it for reason or spite. I do it because I am sick of having something to lose.

I go. I catch his grin, and hope he means it. ■

Innocent Pornographers:

Letters and Recordings of Doris Dana and Gabriela Mistral

Elizabeth Horan

"You think I don't know danger? You think that, in looking at you, I'm not seeing danger with a face – a false face, with an actress mouth – with lying blushes, and two brown treacherous eyes?"
Sarah Waters, Fingersmith

I Crazy Passion

This real-life lesbian gothic draws from the estate and archives of Gabriela Mistral, the first Nobel Laureate (1945) in Literature from Latin America. Born in an impoverished mountain valley in Chile in 1889, dead in Long Island in 1957, Gabriela had been, in the earlier decades of her fame, a poet-guru and educational celebrity. By the time of this story, she was a cagey diplomat whose connections brought her Cold War residences in Southern California, Mexico and Italy before she lived her last days in Long Island. She more than met her match in Doris Dana, a North American party girl and lipstick lesbian, thirty-one years younger than her. Doris Dana was also an occasional contract employee of the US State Department. The two women scarcely shared a common language when they first met in New York, but their intimate relationship endured past the poet's death, when Doris Dana advanced beyond the earlier supporting parts she'd played, as arm candy, substitute child, and self-abnegating companion to the Nobel Laureate. With Gabriela's death, Doris took on the role of a lifetime: aggrieved literary widow.

Fragments of the Gabriela Mistral-Doris Dana love story have appeared in the Chilean press. Some have wanted to cast the New Yorker as a dissolute pervert who lured the Great Gabriela, our sober poet of children and motherhood, into foreign ways, downhill, that is, into lesbian ruin. But the poet's long-hidden letters tell a different story. While Doris was flirtatious, the Chilean poet believed that she, and not Doris, had made the first moves:

Maybe it was really crazy to enter into this passion. When I consider the earliest things done, I know that it was entirely my fault. I believed that what jumped from your gaze was love and I've seen, later, that you look like that at many people. I was crazy, wild: like a child, Doris, like a child. (20 April 1949, Veracruz).

When Gabriela and Doris first met, Ms. Dana was a hellion from the brittle edges of New York's upper crust. Most of the family wealth had vanished in a

ruinous divorce, the 1929 crash, wild drinking, and bad investments. Yet her father, the adopted heir to a Wall Street millionaire, underwrote his three daughters' first-rate educations, encouraging their talent in drama and medicine. Both Doris and her younger sister (who became the stage and screen star Leora Dana) trained as professional actresses. The erotics of medicine (which would saturate Doris and Gabriela's relationship) was another family legacy. Doris's mother had been a nurse and her older sister became a doctor.

Doris's history of breakdowns gave her an unrivalled expertise as a consumer of high-priced medical attention – another attraction for Gabriela, who was, like Doris, a life-long hypochondriac. The two women took turns playing at or being ill. Further woven into their dramas of diagnoses and pills, injections and hospitals were Doris Dana's frequent disappearances. She was, as Gabriela quickly saw, a flighty girl:

"The thing today was your second escape, after the one from New York to California, to get away from the psychiatrist. Are there still others? Is it a system?" (10 June 1949, Veracruz).

The slim and very pretty twenty-seven year-old swept the tall Chilean off her size-40 feet. The New Yorker's good bones, steely will and well-bred accent recalled the actress Katherine Hepburn, but Doris Dana's bread-and-butter role was far darker. The poet, who believed in karma, saw the pale-skinned, dark-eyed young woman's resemblance to her recently-deceased nephew, Juan Miguel, the boy she'd nicknamed "Yin Yin" and raised from infancy. Gabriela wrote of Doris and Yin as near twins:

"Go sleep, dear, copper-colored hair, eyes of Yin, discreet and fine as marble, the color of apple blossoms, go sleep. May God close your eyelids" (26 April 1948, Veracruz). "You and Yin were my two failures and my two passions – Passion with a capital letter and with the other..." (29 November 1949, Veracruz).

Gabriela believed that she had, as she wrote elsewhere, "come in vain for Yin." As their income depended on journalism and consular work, their residences were even more irregular than the boy's schooling. The poet's

friend Palma Guillén, of Mexico, joined them in drifting across Europe in the years leading up to WWII. Palma was the disciplinarian, while Gabriela was an indulgent parent, so the boy had money to burn. His disorder and lack of discipline became evident when the invasion of France pushed him and Gabriela to Brazil where, in murky circumstances, on Friday, August 13 1943, Yin Yin swallowed arsenic. He was eighteen years old.

Gabriela suffered a total breakdown. “Who was that woman that was shouting, last night, Gabriela had asked the nurse, the day after Yin Yin died. ‘It was you,’ they told her.”

Although Gabriela had, in effect, no more family outside of a crazy, invalid older, half-sister, her many friends came, as always, to her rescue. Few were smarter than Palma Guillén, a mastermind, trained in logic and psychology, who stood by the poet for more than thirty years. With Gabriela’s help, Palma had become Mexico’s first female Ambassador. When the news of Yin Yin’s death reached Palma in Mexico, she rushed at once to Gabriela’s side. She drafted helpers near and far. Joining her was the poet’s long-time personal assistant and former student, Consuelo “Coni” Saleva, a Puerto Rican. The two women got the poet’s household running again. They nursed her around the clock, orchestrated a partial cover-up and remained in Brazil until Gabriela’s life and sanity seemed out of danger and the war’s end had made it easier to travel again. Palma and Coni did not delay to return to their own countries. As they’d each lived with Gabriela before, they knew the poet’s escalating demands for domestic and secretarial assistance would, if they didn’t escape, swallow them up. So Gabriela Mistral was left uncharacteristically alone, a plum ripe for the plucking, when news of the 1945 Nobel Prizes were announced.

“Yes, they shot me like a rocket from the Swedish ship anchored in the bay, almost without clothes, because I was in Leblón and not Petrópolis,” the poet later recalled, explaining why she’d not asked her friends to join her in Stockholm.

The new Laureate and self-proclaimed child of Chilean democracy continued on, in a post-Nobel tour that stopped in London, Paris, and Rome, Washington and New York. She only cooled her heels on coming to Southern California, where she purchased the first of two houses.

The Chilean consul in Los Angeles was clear that the newest Nobel laureate wasn’t especially welcome, but Mistral’s U.S. presence caught the eye of Eleanor Roosevelt. The former first lady, who wanted more women in the newly-formed United Nations, summoned the Chilean to New York. Eleanor Roosevelt added a reception at Barnard, the women’s college at Columbia University, where Doris Dana, then at loose ends, first set eyes on Gabriela Mistral.

II That Unforgettable Conference at Barnard

The College’s well-upholstered parlor hummed with

diplomats. Trays whirled about. Chilean wine flowed. The event, announced as “invitation only,” opened with precisely the sort of piano and operatic recitals that Mistral most appreciated. No one challenged Doris Dana, who sauntered in, head high, confident and smiling, as a Barnard girl must. She had no difficulty in picking out the poet, even in the crowd. A tall woman, Mistral looked older than her fifty-seven years. Her clothes hung from her formerly solid figure, as she’d lost much weight after her nephew’s death. Her hair, almost completely white, was combed back, and she had arched ample brows. Thinned lips. Skin, the color of wheat, or toast. Men often commented on the beauty of her hands. “Long, slow, white, the hands of a spiritual sower. Dressed as always with manly indifference: ample, tailored, dark clothes; big, comfortable shoes, wool stockings. No feminine ornament.”

The poet seemed distracted as Dean Virginia Gildersleeve, stern and bony, rose from between portraits of her lugubrious predecessors. As the Dean introduced her, Gabriela Mistral remained seated and continuously looked away as if someone else were about to speak. When the introduction ended she turned and raised her luminous green eyes, bringing the room to a complete and sudden hush. She apologized that she would remain sitting, then commenced to read from her notes, which she eventually set aside, in an old trick that snapped her listeners to attention. She looked over and asked the Dean to bring her a glass of water, which she drank slowly, before continuing.

Doris Dana found herself leaning forward to catch the poet’s slow, clear and pleasantly monotonous voice. The poet was an almost medicinal being, born for the monologue, it seemed.

“Xenophobia,” the poet told the crowd, “is motivated by the shock of the new, combined with the hatred industry,” and made worse by nationalism, “an almost zoological pathology.” She argued for “the mestizo destiny” of the Americas, a continent she’d known from end to end, from Canada to Tierra del Fuego, “eating at the best and worst tables.” Alluding to her brown skin, she claimed to “carry the continent’s silt” in her body. She mentioned her Basque, Indian, and Jewish ancestors, then related some shocking scenes she’d witnessed in Europe, both during the war and in her recent travels. She concluded by calling for the world to find “almost Pythagorean unity” in peace and social justice. Applause filled the room.

As Doris Dana lingered, she managed to sidle up to the poet, entering the elevator at the same time. She later revealed that she’d been too timid and uncertain of her Spanish to speak. The poet gave no sign of noting the young woman’s presence as they rode together, three floors down. Mistral was hustled away, leaving Doris Dana alone in the building’s

lobby. She ached to remain alongside the big woman, to reach out with her own small, quick fingers to cover her hand, to lead and follow that large, slow body which moved, beneath long skirts, as if on tiny but invisible wheels

III Boxes Within Boxes

I first met Doris Dana twenty-five years after Gabriela Mistral's death. She was, I'd later learn, famously uninterested in acknowledging or answering her mail. Yet she proved cordial, after I'd written and then phoned her house in the Hamptons. Perhaps our mutual tie to Barnard College swayed her. Perhaps my age mattered, for I was then in my twenties, as Doris Dana had been when she and Gabriela first met. Perhaps the sixty-year-old was curious. In any event, Doris Dana answered her phone and heard me out.

"Phone me when you come through New York," she told me. "We'll have dinner in the Village."

I could scarcely believe my luck: she seemed a cheerful and intelligent interviewee, although she looked unhappy at the voice recorder that I set on our table. She was far more forthcoming as we strolled the darker, narrower streets. She would not speak of the past, even as we passed Stonewall and Washington Square Park. Rather, she complained of the monks who weren't managing to collect Gabriela's royalties as indicated in the poet's will. Her frank fearlessness astonished and inspired me. I'd expected her to shy away from talk of literary property.

"Will you allow me to translate the poetry, and publish it in my work?" I asked.

"As long as there's no money in it, of course."

"Do you have plans for the Gabriela Mistral materials after you die?"

"I have a niece," she said, agreeably. "She'll be handling it." In contrast to the sixty-year-old's openness in discussing property and even her own death was her refusal to acknowledge sexuality.

"What should I say when people, North Americans, ask if Gabriela Mistral was a lesbian?" I hedged.

"Why put her into that little box?" she said.

But I pushed.

"What was it like for you, living as a North American, a woman, sharing your life with another woman in Mexico in the late 1940s, the early 1950s? Surely it wasn't easy."

"Oh, Gabriela had so many friends," Doris Dana answered, eyes dancing. "I knew them all! Like that Pablo Neruda. What an operator! He thought Gabriela should be helping him to get the Nobel, so he came to me, proposing that we develop [she snorted] 'an exchange of prizes!'"

Doris Dana and I met again, twice, and we talked on the phone. She still refused to reflect on her younger self or on sexuality. Nor did she comment on the books about Gabriela that she'd asked me to buy

and send her, "anything you see that might be worth wasting time on." The last time I saw her was in 1990, in Naples, Florida, where she owned a cool and beautiful, all-white modernist house facing the Gulf. I was a recent PhD, once again en route to Chile.

Sitting in her light-filled living room, I listened as she once again urged me to press "the people in Chile." "For Heaven's sake," she said. "Get them to redo the microfilms of certain manuscripts." She recalled a visit she'd made, in the sixties, to present the library with a stack of papers she'd spent much time arranging. "I passed the folder along and they dropped it! And picked up the papers, jumbling them together like... a plate of scrambled eggs!"

What could I say, when in Chile, the dance for me, a foreigner – watched and pitied, envied, and dismissed – made fulfilling such assignments unthinkable, with or without the written say-so from her, that she'd promised but never provided.

Seventeen years passed before I began to get a deeper sense of Doris Dana's life. Soon after she died, I answered my office phone and found myself talking with the niece.

"I know who you are," I said. "Your aunt said you'd be handling the estate."

"My aunt never prepared me," she insisted. "Never."

"Why do you think your aunt trusted you to manage her estate?"

"My aunt trusted no one. I was just the last one left standing. And when it came down to it, I was family."

Doris Dana's will established a deadline: the niece had six months to choose and give Gabriela Mistral's papers to a charitable organization. The niece's problem: how to identify and separate what Doris Dana had received from Gabriela? What Gabriela Mistral had given to Doris Dana was layered in with the belongings of several other women who'd known, loved, trusted and passed their possessions on to the canny New Yorker. Every room in Doris Dana's houses contained, not just stacks of books and paper, but change purses, a total of 187, all new, many still in their boxes, with accompanying receipts. Vast quantities of unused note pads, wrapped in plastic. Decades of royalties cheques sorted by date, none of them cashed, but all bound with rubber bands.

The niece, a cordial and enthusiastic hostess, let me join her in excavating the interesting jumble that her aunt had left. The experience provided many hours of satisfaction. Days later, as I sat with the niece in a sunny dining room of yet another women's college, I suddenly realized how to frame the question Doris Dana had evaded.

"Did your aunt think of herself as a lesbian?"

The niece smiled with evident pleasure:

"The world in which Doris Dana lived, especially in her later years, in Naples, Florida, was composed entirely of women who shared every aspect of their lives – emotional, economic – entirely, exclusively with other women. Some called themselves lesbians. Some did not. Within this social world, my aunt enjoyed the cultural cachet she got from having been the close friend and rumored lover of a woman who'd been a well-known Latin American writer."

IV We Could Leave from California

The Doris Dana who reminded Gabriela of the red-and-gold women of Burne-Jones paintings was scarcely evident in the young New Yorker's first fawning letters to Gabriela. Writing in stilted if correct Spanish, she addressed the poet as "my dear Teacher." The young woman shamelessly namedropped. She presented the poet with a smartly published translation of Mistral's essay on her fellow Nobel Laureate, the German writer Thomas Mann. She told Mistral that "*in an age shot through with commercialism a volume like this is worthy of such grace and dignity*" (9 February 1948). Doris Dana stalked her prey with skill: she knew Thomas Mann through mutual friends, so she offered, in subsequent letters, to bring Mistral to meet him, for he was then living in Pacific Palisades, an hour's drive away.

The Chilean begged off, in her reply. "I'm expecting to leave, quite soon, for Mexico." Doris Dana replied that she too, had been planning a trip to Mexico, and offered to drive the poet whenever, wherever she might like. "We could leave from California or whatever other place."

Gabriela liked this prospect of travel, even as she admitted she still couldn't connect her new correspondent's name with a face. To resolve the matter, Mistral invited Dana to visit the "silence and trees" of her house in Santa Barbara, to plan their journey south to Ensenada, Mazatlán, then Guadalajara.

As Doris Dana drove her "very large" car west, she surely contemplated the thrill of entering Thomas Mann's spacious living room with Gabriela Mistral on her arm. She knew, too, that life in California was getting less comfortable for Mistral who, like most Latin American intellectuals, had many friends on the left. In Hollywood, writers with left-wing sympathies were being blacklisted. The US had reinstituted the draft. Venezuela's leftist, elected government fell in a coup. Puerto Rico splintered with strikes. Chile's President expelled Communist Party members from his cabinet, from the electoral rolls, and broke off relations with Soviet Russia and Yugoslavia. What would happen next was anyone's guess.

It's not impossible that the lovely young woman, with her seemingly WASPy background and Hepburn accent, was coached by friends in or near the State Department, helping her to write those letters in

Spanish. But Doris Dana's ability to recognize, learn from, and defeat her immediate rivals was her work alone. From the moment she parked her car in the pine-and-live-oak shaded patio of Mistral's house in Santa Barbara, she juggled the different sides of her personality. For some time Mistral saw only the lively young woman, pleasant and agreeable, full of enlightened chatter and eagerness to learn, slightly unsure of herself, who listened with such sympathy to the poet's descriptions of her longing to join the deceased Yin Yin.

Dana's first and most easily dispatched rival was a retired schoolteacher, an Argentine who'd handled, with great skill, all the poet's publication-related correspondence in Buenos Aires. The Argentine had worked for months to get a visa, coming to California on Mistral's urging, to help the poet with a book. But she held the house's only spare bedroom, which Mistral gave to Doris as the Argentine packed and headed off for Mexico. Doris soon realized, however, that dispatching Coni Saleva, the nurse-secretary, would be a much harder day's work. In the meantime, Doris told Gabriela that she thought it a shame that Coni neglected the garden. Still later, she played on Mistral's paranoia and pointed to the barbiturates that the poet had begun to take, while Coni watched over her.

V Eager Student and Guardian Angel

But were they lovers?

The niece had no clear idea. "My aunt's sense of her own privacy was strong. If they'd been lovers, she wouldn't have done the State Department tours in the 1960s, which included showing people photos she'd taken, of Gabriela Mistral in her nightgown, in bed."

While there was plenty of reason to be skeptical, I found that the archives presented unsuspected contradictions behind Doris Dana's mask. Past the apparently devoted semi-daughter and selfless guardian angel to the aging poet lay a careful schemer. She was extraordinarily successful in getting the poet's full attention. Once the three of them – she, Mistral, and Coni – had removed to Mexico, Doris enlisted Palma's help to get rid of Coni. As soon as Doris succeeded in getting Gabriela to herself, however, she left for New York, leaving the poet on her own. The young woman claimed medical reasons for her absence. She outlined symptoms which closely resembled heart problems that the poet had recently experienced. What Doris didn't say was that her sister Leora had a play opening on Broadway, that winter and spring, *The Madwoman of Chaillot*. There would be parties, to be sure.

The poet's response to the absence of her beloved was to compose letters, play-acting her own jealous desire. One hot day in Veracruz, for example, Gabriela stripped off her flannel nightgown and, "dressed as Mother Eve," wrote to her sweetheart, revealing how

she chanced on a photo of Doris with *“the Dana clan... and with each and all of them you were flirting, and with a happiness that I’ve never seen in my house... I’ll need all my blindness to believe, and wait”* (10 April 1949, Veracruz).

Continuing as jealous lover, Gabriela described how she’d taken scissors to the photos Doris had left behind. The poet cut out the faces of her competitors until only her beloved’s face remained. Gabriela then concluded her Sunday adventure, *“praying for you, that you’d be happy wherever you are, whoever you’re with.”* (10 April 1949, Veracruz).

Gabriela and Doris also exchanged notes in a small black memo book. Gabriela’s handwriting appears in graphite, while Doris used blue pencil. Gabriela opens with one of her favorite themes, “the subterranean,” reflecting her theories that Yankees were often oblivious to undercurrents, to unspoken feelings, and conspiracies. Gabriela played the wise teacher, and Doris – the eager student:

GM: “I have much in me, for you, that’s subterranean, that you still don’t see (not yet).”

DD: “I want to know (and know about) these subterranean things and – you well know that I confide in you – very, very much – in you. I’ve given you the proof of my confidence in you!

GM: “What’s subterranean is what I don’t say, but I give it to you when I look at you and when I touch you without looking at you.

DD: And do you think that in my looking at you and my WAY of touching you, that there’s nothing I can say or show? I’ve spent years, lived centuries, searching for you...”

On the last page, above: “Dr. Sorenzen” and an address in Mexico. Below that, in Doris Dana’s handwriting: “I’m yours, everywhere in the world and in heaven.”

VI The Unforeseen Filial Arm

The poet was living in Long Island when she opened her mouth, one evening, and blood gushed out. Doris Dana was precise in noting the event: “14 November 1956: Hemorrhage 9pm.” Rushed to the hospital, the poet was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. English-speaking New York neighbors witnessed the will that made Doris Dana the Nobel Laureate’s executor, principle heir, and keeper of the flame. No friendly visitor, no medical appointment would escape her notice. “There was the unforeseen filial arm of Doris,” wrote Victoria Ocampo, one visitor.

Doris kept a steady watch over Gabriela Mistral, who slipped into a coma, and received last rites and died without regaining consciousness. When the hearse came to collect her friend’s skinny corpse, the estate paid for Doris Dana to remain behind. She not only had a hospital room of her own, but her role as executor and primary heir gave her the leisure to do

as much or as little as she chose with the enormous cache of unpublished manuscripts. Doris Dana’s ultimate decision – to maintain them as a monopoly – drove her more deeply into the lunacy of frenzied hiding and hoarding that her niece endured when visiting her in Naples. The legacy caused Doris Dana’s life to dwindle to the very opposite of the wild, extravagant possibility that had brought her to Gabriela, six decades earlier.

The widow emerged from the hospital to attend a high requiem mass in Manhattan’s St. Patrick’s Cathedral. She’d already made sure that a professional photographer was en route to the house in Roslyn, Long Island. At her behest, the photographer shot more than thirty black and white stills of the empty house. The light stretched into the empty, shadowless corners, revealing the limp gown, hanging from its hook, the bed, the desolate sheets. Two cats huddled together. Doris Dana wrote in her datebook: “12 January, First night alone. 14 January, Gabriela left for Chile.” ■

I love you / I see you / I kiss you / you awe me / I kiss you / you bite you / my fingers you taste / I miss you / I lose you / you write me / you like me / secrets you tell me / I miss you / I miss you and answer / you tell me so many things / you love me / I love you / you cook and / you feed / I need you / I find you / a mystery / you yell / you hurt me / I swallow your fingers / a tickle / a belly / your tongue / it / on the soles of my feet / I like you / I drink you / you laugh / and bend over / you push me / run up against me / with all of your might / I like you / I like you / I kiss you / and kiss you / and kiss you / surrender / throw myself from the ceiling / the sky / from wherever you want / you love me / you jab me / you pinch me / and spank me / a little / I put up a fight / I love you again / you sleep / I wake up / you're wet / and I'm wet / you hide / I find you / you hold me / I try to resist you / you grab me / resist me / surrender / I have you / release you / I'm jealous / you're jealous / you're stubborn / surrender / and kiss me / I love you / you love me / you're delicious

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Achy Obeyes
for m, on her 26th

Ching-In Chen

Cuttings for My Mother: a Zuihitsu

My mother is worried. She e-mails *It spreads quickly. There are 2000 houses destroyed, 6 persons died, 50,000 people forced to be re-located. Please be alert, call us daily and let us know that you are OK. If you encounter an emergency, remember to recite "Falun Dafa is good." You will be protected.*

In the coffee shop, a Taiwanese girl from my comparative literature class. Iced cappuccino blast placed between her and a young spiky-haired man seated diagonally across from her. Are they studying or flirting? He is not Asian.

Could this have been my mother without a husband and daughter dragged from the other side of the world?

I am the age she was when I was born.
A year older than when she emigrated and married.

Donald Keene, whom my comp lit teacher calls one of *those old, boring guys*, says the zuihitsu is {L}iterally, 'following {the impulses of} the brush,' and consisting of brief essays on random topics.

I love how Kimiko Hahn's zuihitsu includes other writings about the zuihitsu form yet expands from what she knows.

Kimiko, {referring to those who write about writing} states *these essays are closer to poetry*.

She leaves cuttings for her own daughter.
The dedication reads *for Miyako - to leaf through many years from now*.

My mother wants me to sign a petition I can't bring myself to sign, but I edit her letters to the senator or governor. Now that she's taken up the camera, there is less need for an editor.

People could be burning or leaving, but each day, I report to my mother that *I am not affected*. {But forget how I clutch my inhaler more than usual.}

She asks *Can you see the fires? The burning?* I say *no* - disconnected.

Four women and a man doused themselves with petroleum in Tian'anmen Square and set themselves on fire.

It didn't mean much to me, except my mother.

She had been going to lectures and practicing a new spiritual practice. Then the Chinese government banned Falun Gong as a cult.

In 1963, a Buddhist monk burned himself, a ritual suicide in protest of the Vietnam War.

My mother denies the people on fire were Falun Gong practitioners. She says *their actions were against the law of the Fa*.

On the phone, she says, *there is a new Chinese center in Boston*.

Chinatown? I ask.

I went with your father to the Peabody Essex Museum. I'm surprised she went to his work function; she's

refused to go anywhere with him, which sets off his quick bursts of temper.

Last year, I took my mother's place and made small talk.

Last weekend, my friend learned her mother probably has cancer and will die.

Another friend lost his mother to cancer. She, being a Falun Gong practitioner, did not allow her family to acknowledge her illness.

I know I will never show this writing to my mother. I do not intend this as a cutting for an unborn child.

Luckily she has not pressured me about having children or getting married. I'm not sure if it's because she's supposed to let go of attachments or because she's afraid I'm queer. Sometimes I miss those lectures {premarital sex, AIDS}.

I once wrote a story about a girl whose mother died. My father got angry with me. *What if someone picked that up off the street and thought your mother was dead?*

But it's fiction, I protested.

Later, writing non-fiction about my mother, I just called it fiction.

The only time I read poetry in front of my mother – she didn't want to come; it conflicted with a study group – I screamed my poems, but could not look at her.

I did not advance to the next round of the slam, and my friend said I *had been good, but too loud*.

My mother later said that I *shouldn't have hidden behind that paper because no one could see my face*.

I've only recently begun to write about my father. At first, I resented his attempts to mother me.

Your mother used to be such a good mother and wife, he said, *and now the house is messy. All she cares about is Falun Gong*. I agree with him and yet disagree.

I resent him for sitting on the couch with the Chinese newspaper while she cooked and cleaned and vacuumed.

When my aunties (his sisters) came, they said *But that's a woman's job. Doesn't your father mow, fix things?* I said *Yes*, but in my head, *cooking and laundry and cleaning are things you have to do all the time*.

In the last year of his MFA program, a friend wrote only in the *zuihitsu* form, dealing with the contradiction of being in graduate school and disconnected from his community

A year later, I am living this contradiction; Yesterday, his newly reformatted MySpace page said –

The moment of change is the only poem – Adrienne Rich

Also, In a former life, I used to: write everyday.

A few weeks ago, he told me to get out of Los Angeles as soon as I could. I haven't talked to him since.

You'd think, being a writer, I could figure out how to communicate with my mother. But maybe, *this is why I'm a writer*.

In class, Chris Abani says *I will kill my mother* {figuratively} *and consume her*.

But Kimiko writing about the daughter is writing about the mother: *The toughest thing is protecting her from my poetry*. ■

The Luck of Finding a Stationary Car

Ben Fergusson

38

The car stood on the road, the engine running. The sun had made the tarmac hot and the smell of it mixed with the smell of the grass, in the next-door meadow and on the roadside, dried brown from the sun. The car was an orangey-red Ford Escort, twelve years old; the paint covered with a soft white bloom, like a fresh grape, from fifteen years unwaxed. A grasshopper, or possibly a cricket, sang briefly, and then stopped, and then there was just the car, chugging and stationary, and the sun, which was so hot it seemed to make a sound of its own; a seething low hush.

Daniel was at eye height with the glove compartment, emptying cassette boxes onto the floor of the car, into the well at the foot of the passenger seat, already dusted with crumbs, and dirt; wrappers, receipts stained brown at the creases, plastic bottle tops and leaked biros, streaked black with glossy, dried ink. Daniel paused and rested his head on the seat he was lying across, his seatbelt pulling him back up straight, cutting through his T-shirt, into his shoulder. He found a tape with a white label, fuzzy where the top layer of paper had been ripped off; it had DAN'S SUMMER MIX written across it in thick felt-tip that bled into the fibres of the ripped paper, and he turned it to face him, and pushed his glasses up where they'd slipped on the sweat and grease on the bridge of his nose.

When he heard a knock and clunk, he thought it was another tape box falling to the floor, but it was the car door opening and he looked up and saw a man there, breathing heavily as if he had been running. The sun was directly behind him and escaped over his shoulder so that Daniel couldn't make out his face, just a black-grey silhouette.

"Hi," said the man.

"Er, hi," said Daniel.

"You couldn't give me a lift could you? Just down the road, to the next village." The man, disarmingly charming, climbed in, forcing Daniel to sit back. He filled the car up with his smell: new sweat, cheap deodorant, slightly stale smoky breath. He was handsome, sandy-haired, maybe 30, with nice solid

features, tanned arms with long hairs, bleached blonde by the sun, and blue eyes, like turquoises. Daniel didn't say anything.

"Thanks, mate. My car just broke down. I've been waiting for ages."

Daniel had his hands on the steering wheel. The turning of the engine made it pulsate beneath his fingers, up-and-down-and-up-and-down. Daniel looked away from the man down the road, rough and grey in the heat. "Which one?"

"Hmm?" said the man.

"Which village?"

"The next one."

"North Leigh?"

The man scratched his forehead, then ran his hands through his hair, rubbing the back and stroking it down to his neck. "Eh, yeah. North Leigh." The man stared forward down the road, his elbow on the windowsill, touching a small gold loop in his left ear. He looked over at Daniel expectantly then, checking himself, put out his hand for Daniel to shake. Daniel shook it, and said "Daniel" and waited for a name back, which he didn't get, so he put the car in gear and pulled away.

With a stranger in his car, he noticed how filthy it was: the footprints of pay-and-display tickets climbing up the left-hand side of the windowsill; the bonnet covered in white-and-black roundels of bird shit the shape of bullet holes; the windscreen streaked with water marks from the hands, cloths and bits of clothing used to rub the condensation off the inside of the car in winter.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" said the man.

Daniel looked across. He had his hand in a small pocket badly stitched onto his T-shirt, which held a golden box of Benson & Hedges. "Er, no, that's fine."

"You want one?" he said, offering up the open-lid.

"No. No, thank you."

The man lit up with a match, which he shook to put out the flame and tossed out the window. He pulled open the car's ashtray, but it bloomed a bouquet of multi-coloured sweet wrappers, as if from a magician's sleeve. Daniel felt sick with embarrassment. The man

let out a little puff of laughter, and tried to close it again, holding the cigarette in his mouth, using both hands to stuff the contents back in and close the drawer. He flicked the ash out of the window.

"Not much of a tidier, eh?"

"No," said Daniel, and tried to smile.

"First car?" said the man.

"Yup."

"Yeah, mine was a mess too."

They stopped at a T-junction and Daniel waited for a black car to pass, squinting up the road into the sun, before pulling away in the same direction. He caught the edge of the man's bare knee with his arm as he changed into second. He felt the hair there, surprisingly soft, on the back of his hand. The man didn't move.

"Could you pass me my sunglasses?" said Daniel.

"Hm?"

"They're in the side pocket, I think."

The man lifted his arm and looked into the pocket beside him. "Can't see anything."

"Just in the compartment."

"No," said the man, putting his hand in the pocket and rooting around. "Can't see anything."

Daniel sighed and put the visor down in front of him, and reached over to put down the one in front of the man. "Sorry," said Daniel. "Sorry."

"No worries," he said.

The man reached up and adjusted the visor, and for a second his T-shirt slipped so that Daniel could see the hair of his armpit, darker than the hair on his arms, slightly clotted with sweat. Daniel wondered how adults invited sex and what he would need to do if he wanted to invite it. Could he do something or say something that would make it clear that that was an option? Something that would make it clear he was available, but not antagonise the man if he wasn't interested. But of course it was an impotent fantasy, because he didn't know the rules. Instead, he busied himself trying to take in as much of the scene as he could, trying to take in the man piece by piece, so that he could recall it in bed that night and live out the potential encounter.

They came into North Leigh. The man didn't make any sign that he wanted to stop, so Daniel said: "Whereabouts?"

"Huh?"

"Whereabouts do you want me to drop you?"

The man thought for a second. "The next village."

"This is the next village. North Leigh."

"Oh," he said, and he looked in the rear view mirror for a second. "The next one." And then checking himself, he said more effusively, "Sorry, mate, I don't know the area that well, do you mind going to the next one? What's the name of the next one?"

"Stanton."

"Yeah, that one. That would be great. This is such

a help. You're really helping a man out, you know."

They carried on until the next village, until they were almost through it. The man stared out the window as if he was daydreaming.

"Somewhere here?" said Daniel.

"Oh," said the man, and sighed. "Not just here. Can we go a bit further?"

But they were almost out of the village, so Daniel stopped the car and said, "Sorry, but I've got to get back home." Sweat suddenly burst across his back, under his T-shirt and stung his armpits. And then as an automatic afterthought, "My Mum's waiting for me, so..." he trailed off.

The man touched the car door, then turned and looked at Daniel. Daniel held his gaze for a second, then looked away down to the floor. He held a fleshy bit of his inner lip with his teeth. The man sniffed and moved and Daniel thought he was getting out of the car. But then he stopped again and stared at Daniel; it was aggressive, but tinged with something like sorrow, he would later think. Daniel waited, and then noticed the man was holding something, and looking away from him, down to his lap, saw that it was a knife held flat onto his leg. He wasn't threatening him with it as such, just holding it there – showing him he had it. It had a black handle and a thick silver blade, one edge of which was slightly scalloped. The blade was lightly scratched, and was polished enough for Daniel to see his own reflection in it.

"I'm sorry, John," said the man, low and miserable.

"My name's Daniel," he replied automatically.

"Sorry, Daniel," The man said.

Daniel put his hands on the steering wheel again and faced forward.

"You're going to have to drive. You understand?"

"Yes," said Daniel, but there was no sound in the answer; it was just a whisper.

"Good," said the man, looking ahead, too, and sitting back in his seat.

They waited for a few seconds and Daniel realised that he hadn't passed any broken-down cars on the road before he stopped and then the man, more animated, lifted the knife up a little and said, "Well?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"I don't know," he said. "Just keep going straight unless I say otherwise."

"How do you know no one's going to come?" said the man.

"It's a farmer's track. There'd only be the farmer."

"How do we know he won't come?"

Daniel blinked. He was shaking. "Well... well, we don't, but it's unlikely. There's nowhere else I can think of. Nowhere else that we could sit in a car."

The man nodded.

The trees around them made a gentle silhouette on the bonnet. Daniel wondered whether he could get

out and run and his muscles tensed. But then he felt the blade in his back as he fell onto the floor, probably less painful than he imagined and more confusing. He would probably try and roll over and find his legs weren't working and would hear the man running away, while his body went cold.

The man opened the passenger door and hung a leg out, then lit another cigarette. He pushed himself back in his seat and put his other foot on the dashboard. He was wearing canvas trainers and no socks, the laces of the trainers so old and overused they looked as if they would snap at any moment.

"Who knows you're out?" said the man.

"Mum," Daniel said. "And my sister. They're both at home."

"What are they up to today?"

"Hmm?" said Daniel.

"What are they up to today? What are they doing?"

"Nothing. I don't know." Then checking himself. "But we're meant to be having lunch together. So they'll be expecting me soon."

The man looked at his watch.

"It's 10.30. What the fuck kind of time do you eat lunch?"

"I..."

"Mum gets up at seven to put the beef on, does she? Dedicated woman."

Daniel didn't reply. He looked at his fingernails and thought he should have cut them. They looked long and girlish. He folded his fingers into his palms to make fists to hide them, and put an arm on the sill of the car window. He wondered if he would be allowed to open his door and hang his leg out, which was now intensely fidgety.

The man was tapping the tip of the knife on the handle of the glove compartment: click, click, click, click, click, click, click, click.

Far away, from a distant main road, there was the breathy sound of traffic, and the day afforded no wind to drive away the heat or sooth Daniel. Instead there was just the intermittent sound of passing insects and birdsong, which, unchecked and concentrated on, began to become cacophonous and unimaginably loud, as if the trees and the sky were crammed full of them, swarming and shouting. He imagined their beaks opening and closing, their beaded eyes and tiny sharp tongues, licking out the calls. He imagined a sea of insects pulsing with sound, their shiny black bodies pumping as they rubbed together their wing cases and their feet to make a tight, high-pitched scream.

"So, Daniel, what is it you do?"

"I go to school."

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

The man nodded and looked out into the woods

next to the farm track. He began to click a drumbeat with the edge of his knife: click, click, knock, click, click, knock, click, click, knock. He begun to sing a song under his breath, "Seventeen, look at you now, you gotta hold on my heart, du, du, du, du..." He turned to Daniel moving back into the seat. "What do you do at school, Daniel? Dan. Danny. People ever call you Danny?"

"My Dad used to."

"Not anymore."

"He's dead."

"Wow, fuck," said the man. "I wish my Dad was dead, fucking Satan." Daniel could smell his breath, now wet and ashy from another cigarette. "What did he die of?"

"He, er... cancer. It was before I was born, so I don't remember."

Though in fact Daniel's mother, pregnant with Daniel, had come home and found him hanging from the young cherry tree in the garden, the weight of him causing the limb he had attached the rope to to bend slowly during the day, so that when she found him he appeared to be kneeling down to pray.

"Shit. Sorry. Tough for your Mum. Your Mum must be a good woman, eh?"

"Yeah, I suppose."

"You should respect her. You should respect your Mum. People don't respect their Mums enough. I knew this guy, Paul he was called, lived near me, his Dad used to beat his Mum. It was horrible. You would always see her out with a black eye and that. And then he got married to this woman, Pauline, and then he started beating her. Exactly the same. Funny, isn't it? But that's what happens apparently. This woman Pauline didn't put up with it like his Mum did. Stuck a fucking kitchen knife in his gut. Fucking deserved it, if you ask me. Can't treat a woman like that." And he pointed his knife at Daniel. "Mind you don't treat your woman like that." And he laughed a little and then lay back in the seat and stared out the window.

"What are you going to do with me?" said Daniel tentatively, expecting a punch in the face. The man sat up in his chair, and his face contracted. Daniel squinted his eyes and braced himself.

"What the fuck do you think I'm going to do?" said the man. "We're just waiting this out. I'm not a fucking paedo or something. I'm not a fucking murderer. Fucking hell. We're just waiting this out. For fuck's sake. You're just the wheels man, you know. You're the mode, you know, the access, or whatever."

Although a little relieved, if unconvinced, Daniel was a bit sad at the idea that he was just a child. There was a strange disappointment, even then, at the sexual possibility being stripped away.

The man got out of the car, and Daniel felt it list and bounce as it lost his weight. He walked around a little, still holding the knife, with the other hand in

his pocket. He tapped the side of the knife on his bare leg and looked at the floor, kicking bits of rock about, and making little clouds of dust. Every thirty seconds or so his eyes would flick up, and he would check Daniel's position.

"I need to take a piss," said Daniel.

"Yeah?" said the man.

"Yeah."

The man said, "Go on, then." Daniel got out of the car and stood dumbly by the door. "What are you waiting for?" said the man.

"Well, how far can I go?"

"Fucking hell. Do you want me to come and hold it for you? Just piss there."

"Here? But it'll be all over the ground by the car."

The man stood open-mouthed in a put-on expression of disbelief. "Just get on with it."

Daniel turned round, but knowing that the man was standing there meant he couldn't go and he was so bursting that he wished he could stick that knife in his belly and let it all just flow out with his blood down his legs. His face flushed up with embarrassment and he took in a deep breath, shook his penis and put it back in his pants.

"You haven't even pissed," said the man. "What are you up to?"

"I did," said Daniel.

The man walked around the car and looked at the ground in front of Daniel.

"No, you haven't. What are you playing at?"

"Nothing," said Daniel.

"What the fuck are you up to?"

"Jesus, nothing! I just ... I can't piss knowing that you're there. I can't."

"I'm not a queer. I have no interest in your dick."

"I didn't mean that. I mean, I don't think that. I just – you know you'd be able to hear it."

"And?"

"Then I can't go."

"Jesus Christ," said the man. He shook his head and said, "How bad is it?"

"It's really bad. It really hurts."

"Jesus fucking Christ. Fine." He turned round and put his fingers in his ears and started singing "Frère Jacques" in a tuneless shout.

Daniel was planning to piss, he wasn't planning anything else, and he didn't even really think about it as an opportunity, he just found himself getting in the car, starting the engine and reversing. He didn't see the man turn, and the man didn't say anything, but Daniel heard his feet on the track and then he was at the door and Daniel cried out as the man swung in.

When Daniel came to he was aware of stones digging into the side of his face and then of the heavy aching around his eye and he thought he'd probably been punched. He didn't want to open his eyes. He wondered if he stayed unconscious whether the man

would leave him alone, but he seemed to know Daniel was awake.

"Hey. Hey, David."

"Daniel," said Daniel.

He opened his eyes and saw the man's face above him, and trees and sky behind that. "Daniel, sorry. My mind's like a fucking sieve. You alright?"

It seemed a stupid question, but Daniel still said, "Yeah." Then realised he'd pissed himself.

"You shouldn't have run, man. I wasn't gonna do anything. Not if you don't run. We've gotta just stay tight, you know? Just tight. Promise. Won't be for long. But you can't run. Or something bad's gonna happen. Alright?"

"Alright," said Daniel.

They sat opposite each other in the shade of the long poplars on the track. The piss had more or less dried, but Daniel could still smell the strong yellow stink of it. The man flicked stones with his knife.

"Got a girlfriend?" said the man.

"No," said Daniel.

"Gay?" said the man.

"No," said Daniel. "Jesus."

"Doesn't matter if you are. Makes no difference to me. I knew this gay bloke once." The man flicked a stone into the air and hit it with the knife as if he was serving in tennis. He laughed and tried it again, but missed the stone, then lay on his back stretching his arms above his head and closed his eyes. "Maybe I'll take a nap," he said. His T-shirt had pulled up and exposed his belly, which was round, with the same soft blond hair trickling down from his navel to the top of his pants, where a little ripple of curls marked the top of his pubic hair. Daniel looked down at it, looking away every now and again in case the man opened his eyes. "But you'd probably run or nab this knife, eh? Probably stab me through the neck if I took a nap."

Daniel said nothing and wondered if he lay back, too, whether he could see up the man's shorts, and then all of a sudden, became ashamed that he was covered in piss and was trying desperately to mentally photograph every last detail of the body of a man who had kidnapped him, so that if he did survive the day, he could go home and masturbate and imagine the man pulling off his shorts and letting Daniel blow him.

"Like school?" said the man.

"No."

"Me neither. Fucking hated it. Why do you hate it?"

"I don't know."

The man put his hands underneath his head and looked at Daniel. "No, come on, tell me."

"I don't know," said Daniel again and began to pick at the collar of his T-shirt. "I mean, it's just full of arseholes. And it's not even the bullies, it's just everyone's all trying to be, like, I don't know... it

sounds really teenage.”

“How old are you?”

“Seventeen.”

“Go on, then.”

Daniel laughed. “Yeah, I suppose. Well, I just mean, it’s like there’s this guy called Rob Wilkinson, and he’s a bit shorter than me, plays football, but not that great and he’s in the top set, but at the bottom of it, because he doesn’t really care about, well, anything. And that’s perfect. That’s what everyone wants to be like. Boring and not caring.” He stopped playing with his collar and picked at the lace holes on his shoes. “And that’s just shit.”

“Put it there, brother,” said the man, smiling, putting his hand out for Daniel to shake. “I’m with you there.” Daniel shook it. “Fuck the boring people.”

“Yeah,” said Daniel, “Fuck them.”

The man laughed and closed his eyes again. The countryside seemed very quiet – perhaps there was a breeze now. Then a bird flew up into the sky awkwardly, whistling as it went, perhaps a grouse, thought Daniel, then seeing it’s long brown tail, realised it was a pheasant. Then a group of birds flew up, pheasants again, and the man opened his eyes and pushed himself up onto his elbows. Daniel looked passed his car and saw a shadow forming in the bush, which he discounted as the breeze, but then there was a flick of moving white, like a lick of paint, which Daniel read out loud. POLICE.

“Shit,” said the man, and grabbed Daniel’s T-shirt pulling him to his feet. Daniel scrambled up and they began to run, Daniel running awkwardly sideways, because the man was holding the edge of his T-shirt up too high. Daniel tried to look behind him and was vaguely aware of one of the policemen resting on the open door of the car.

“They’ve got guns,” cried Daniel. The man wrenched harder on Daniel’s T-shirt and laughed horribly as an answer. “Put the knife down. They’ve got guns.”

“Shut up,” shouted the man, pulling Daniel in closer and waving the knife in his face.

“Put the knife down. Put the knife down, or they’ll shoot you.”

“They don’t carry guns, you twat. They don’t shoot you if you’ve just got a knife.” The man pulled at Daniel’s T-shirt again and brought his face closer to his and Daniel screamed out involuntary and closed his eyes and stumbled. His face burst all over with heat and salty wetness, like sweat, but it was in his mouth as well and it tasted of old coins and he

realised it was blood and only then he heard the delayed crack of the gun ricocheting around the trees causing a fluttering of wings and clucking from the fields. Then he had hold of the man’s shirt and fell to the floor with him and though he realised it was the man’s blood and the man had been shot, he grappled with his dead body on the ground, all the while keeping his eyes closed, until they were embracing and then he sought out the nape of his neck with one hand and his lower back with other, stroking the soft hair there, while he listened to the booted feet hitting the dried mud of the farm track and he inhaled the man’s deodorant and the sweat on his T-shirt. ■

“The Luck of Finding a Stationary Car” is a page turner with ambition. It addresses a subject recognizable to any gay person – that is, the problem of a lust that has no idea how to express itself, but is driven to find a way. That feeling overrides every other feeling, as well it might. At the same time, the world of the story is supported with wonderfully accurate prose, lovely images that are detailed and palpable. That accuracy itself gives the story a kind of tenderness and validity. **Robert Glück and Sarah Waters, Judges, Chroma International Queer Writing Competition, 2008.**



43

Heat Seeker

Donna Collier

44

My name is Denise and I often spend time at the Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath. The women are usually in various stages of undress, sunning, or swimming in the algae-filled water. Their ages vary from teenager to elderly and most of them come in the company of friends. When breasts are bared in public, I usually avoid watching because I believe it is inappropriate to stare. Being surrounded by tranquility, trees, grass and a good book is enough. While relaxing at the pond, I've been reading *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters.

When the sun goes down, I pack up my things and trek to the local pub, The King William, affectionately known as The Willie. It is one of the oldest gay pubs in London, I've been told.

Being in a new city can be lonely. Being in a new country, even lonelier. I live in a small one bedroom flat in London. I've lived here for six months and have six more to go before I return home. I'm alone, black, lesbian, a writer and from America.

I buy a Stella and sit with my back against the wall. The bar is made of thick, dark wood and the tables are round, surrounded by small, cushioned stools. The bartender is friendly and the pub is filled with men. Laughing men. Smoking-cigarettes men. Hugging men. It feels like a small sanctuary, even if the boys aren't interested in conversing with a lesbian. I finish my Stella and decide to make a change in my life. My social life, that is. My aim? To become like a heat-seeking missile and find the lesbians.

Though their location is obvious to those who already know where to find them, they're hidden like ants in a hill to people like myself. When I got back to my flat, I trawled the Internet and found a London lesbian website, Gingerbeer. Events and locations were listed that brought the promise of meeting lots of lesbians even closer. One such event was a dinner.

I arrived at the restaurant early and sat at the long banquet table with the sign: *Reserved For Gingerbeer*. The room was cold and the only people there were the maître d' and several heterosexual-looking couples at the small, outer tables. I was alone and still lonely.

A tall, slender blonde woman walked through the door. She wore makeup, nail-polish and walked as if she were floating on air. I had to force myself to look away; it makes no sense to look desperate, even if you are. Where the hell were those Gingerbeeries? When I heard the word Gingerbeer, I looked up to see the maître d' pointing directly at me, so I waved at the blonde. Yes, I was Gingerbeer. No, There was no one else. We looked like deer caught in an unexpected headlight.

Her eyes were green. Not deep green but a sort of glassy green with a brown fleck below each pupil. *Her perfume smelled like vanilla and heaven and she was sexy.*

"Hi, I'm Ariel." She held out her hand. It was soft, though cold.

Shortly thereafter, about thirty lesbians filed through the door. The wine flowed and the food was ordered and eaten. *She smelled like vanilla and heaven and she was sexy.* I laughed loudly at her jokes. Too loudly. I leaned in closely to hear what she was saying. Perhaps too closely. Her voice was like the tinkling of wind chimes.

"What do you have on?"

"What? My shirt?"

"Hold up your hand."

I was happy to do so. I held out my wide palm and long fingers so she could see what I had to offer, while smiling and gazing at her voluptuous lips. She gently touched my wrist and laughed. Her nails were painted slasher red.

"You have on two watches!"

"No, I don't."

"Yes, you do. Look."

Plain as day, there they were: a stainless steel watch and a smaller one with a blue band. My face flushed hot as I tucked my hand in my lap.

"I guess I wasn't paying attention when I got dressed."

"I think it's cute," she said.

Going home, the London Underground felt like a familiar grey rodent, burrowing through the sludge. When I went to bed, I couldn't sleep. All I could think

of was the dinner with Ariel. I had given her my phone number in case she'd wanted to go out sometime. She hadn't given me hers in return. She simply said, thank you. I've done that before. It's a polite way of letting someone know you're not interested.

Two days later, she called and invited me to Kenwood House. I dropped my pen, closed my writing pad, tied a nylon jacket around my waist and made sure to grab only one watch. The sun was out and the freshly cut grass smelled marvelous throughout my neighborhood. The Tube was crowded and smelly but the feel of it being like an underground rodent was gone; a swift dragonfly with glistening wings had replaced it.

Ariel was waiting for me in light gray corduroy trousers and a tight stretch top that accentuated her braless breasts, perky and cone-like. Quite unlike my cups, which held large orbs. We hugged and she gave me a kiss on each cheek.

"You smell lovely."

"I wore it so I could smell good for you." Sometimes my mouth will move before my brain tells it to shut up.

Ariel laughed. "Your honesty is so cute."

We walked throughout the park arm in arm, admiring the trees, the well-tended lawn and the brilliantly colored flowers. When we tired and went to Kenwood House for a sit down and a bite to eat, both The Brewhouse and The Steward's Room were full of hungry, jabbering adults and boisterous children.

"I come here a lot," she said. "And there are usually seats outside. You get a table and I'll get the food."

When the table next to the squalling child became empty, I power-walked over to claim it. A nice elderly couple had the same idea but my stride was longer and quicker. They didn't have to wait long for another table, a prime table that offered privacy, with an ivy overhang that protected them from the sun and squalling children. It was justice. Karma had worked quickly.

Ariel waited with slices of lavender cake and two elderberry sodas. We talked with ease until the air cooled and I put on my jacket and Ariel slipped into a red sweater. I wanted to drape myself across her skin and be near her hair, her neck, her shoulders.

The elderberry drinks and my perfume were attracting bees. They circled and landed in my drink or near my face and neck. I pretended it didn't bother me, but I was starting to twitch. Ariel, nonchalantly and without much ado, dipped a finger into her glass of elderberry and enticed the bees away from me and on to her finger. With that smooth move, she pressed herself into my heart.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, dark clouds covered the sun and the temperature dropped. A loud rumble and the sky shook and rain fell. The other outdoor diners abandoned their tables and ran into the café

entrance to wait for the storm to pass. The rain continued to pour as Ariel and I talked, and by now, held hands. She looked beautiful with rain pouring off her face, her hair... her skin... the tip of her nose... her lickable neck. We were thoroughly soaked and shivering from the bitter cold. Ariel suggested we go to her place to warm up and dry off.

My romantic time with Ariel lasted for four months, at which point and to my dismay, she decided it felt too much like a marriage. She needed space, freedom, more time alone.

To help me get over the bleak feeling I was left with, I hung out at a dive called The Vespa Lounge. Since I could no longer focus on writing, I was compelled to seek out more activity with lesbians. Vespa was full of cigarette smoke and casual women who wore jeans and dirty trainers. The toilets were often flooded and to use one meant standing in pools of urine. Despite the place being a stinky butt-crack, everyone was friendly. That's a plus in London, a city known for its coldness to strangers.

I met Beth at Vespa the night they showed *Tipping The Velvet* on the bar's wide screen.

"Would you like a drink?" Her face told me she liked what she saw.

We were sitting at a table near the back. She had shoulder-length brown hair and green eyes and because I'm drawn to green eyes, I couldn't let the opportunity pass me by.

"Yes, please. A red wine."

By the time *Tipping* was over, I had found out that she loved to travel and dance. Tango, Salsa, if you could name it, she could do it. We danced at Vespa until closing time. Taking it slowly, we went out on several dates before she invited me over.

On the way to her place, the weather turned frigid. Her bedroom heater was busted and her room was as cold as it was outside. My body does not respond well in icy rooms. Beth and I never saw each other again after that night. To this day, I blame it on the weather.

Two weeks later, craving a spinach crêpe, I put on a sweater, a jacket, gloves and a hat, and headed for the best ones, in Hampstead, right next to The Willie. I ordered my crêpe with garlic cheese and I waited for it to be prepared, anticipating my first bite.

The woman behind me said, "Are you American?"

"Yes?" I turned around.

"I'm Hannah," she said. "I've seen you in The Willie before."

"Are you going in?" I said.

Her eyes were blue, not green. She looked like a teenage boy with a voice like warm honey and a face that was soft. We drank lager in The Willie and Hannah rolled a cigarette, smoked it nervously. Her fingernails were bitten short and stained from nicotine.

"I have to go home and walk my dog," she said.

"It's not far. Do you want to come?"

Her flat needed a good cleaning. There were clumps of dog hair on everything. Just as I sat on the couch and waited for her to return from dog duties, having decided I couldn't stay, the door opened with a rush of air and Hannah burst in, all smiles and cheer. The dog lay down and went to sleep. I stayed a bit longer. After a cup of tea and another smoke, Hannah kissed me. We became a mesh of arms and legs, rolling around as if we were in a wrestling match. It was hot and rough and it worked. For the first time, I didn't think of Ariel when I touched someone.

I visited Hannah several more times before I had to admit I was allergic to dust and dogs.

My next stop was Club Wotever. A place where gender queers dress up and have fun. The night's theme was Hollywood, so I wore a navy pinstriped suit, a white shirt and a blue and red silk tie. Boys (or were they girls?) wore dresses, heels and stockings. Girls (or were they boys?) in suits wore their cocks and dildos so the bulge could be seen, their intentions known. They were all there. The tall, short, light and dark. It was like being in a cabinet of curious non-conformists.

I sidled up to the bar, full of fake bravado and ordered a beer. The person standing next to me had on a black suit complete with stovepipe hat and unlit cigar. She looked good. The club normally would have been too crowded for my taste but the dimmed lighting and the themed outfits helped make it cozy.

Stage music started downstairs and the MC announced the upcoming act. The crowd moved towards the show like waves at high tide. All except one woman, who must have been 6ft tall, wearing stilettos and a tight strapless dress. She came towards me and the river of people parted to let her through. Red, blue and black tattoos covered her shoulders and chest. Her makeup and flash rhinestone eyeglasses were perfect. She gave me a once over, grabbed my hand and kissed it.

"I love butches," she said. "And you're gorgeous."

Her name was Sarah and she was from Scotland. Her voice made me think of a bird of prey signaling to its young, which was fine by me because I needed to be fed. I had never been with a woman that tall before but I learn quickly. Contrary to my belief, long legs do not require hours of undivided attention.

A few nights later, Sarah introduced me to Club Fukk.

"Club Fukk?" I said.

"Exactly," she said.

I wore leather trousers and she wore a bright red, corseted dress. Her legs seemed to stretch from the floor to the sky. We walked down the stairs into a room of canned smoke and people in various stages of undress. The smell of sweat, perfume and pussy floated in the air as we passed a large naked woman

with dark hair being flogged by her large-breasted mistress; a woman with blonde hair lying in a hammock being fucked; and a woman with tight muscles wearing nothing but tattoos and boots being spanked. The sounds of flogging, fucking and sucking filled the air.

I followed Sarah to the far wall. She yanked my zipper down in one pull and got down on her knees in front of me. I leaned against the wall as she guided me into her mouth. Even though she was gorgeous, I found myself imagining she was Ariel and surrendered to my feelings.

I stayed in the heat-seeking mode until my year in London was drawing to an end. My novel wasn't finished. I called Ariel to tell her I was leaving and how glad I was to have met her. And so, for the next six months, my darling Ariel and I drove through the USA visiting natural attractions, tourist traps and lesbian hotspots. Wherever our fingers landed on a map, that's where we went. Soon we'll be returning to London for our Civil Partnership. The heat seeker has found a home. ■

Robyn Vinten
**What is Complicated
and What is Not**

What is Complicated

1. The 243 bus route from Waterloo Bridge to Stamford Hill. Unnecessarily so.
2. Negotiations as to who's place we will stay at tonight.
3. The silence between us after we have agreed on the awfulness of the show.
4. Your feelings about my presence beside you on the bus. Apparently.
5. You telling me about the text from your ex and how you had to ring and... I don't know. I stopped listening.
6. Standing up. Getting off the bus, alone. But I do it.

What is Simple

1. The show that we have just seen. Simply awful.
2. My arm around your shoulder. The warmth of your body next to mine.
3. My question. "Do you want me here?"
4. The sound of my breaking heart.
5. The other people getting on and off the bus. Their lives, I hope. Their loves.
6. Waking in the morning. Reaching out to stroke the cat.

Sleep: Three Possible Stories

Eduardo Muslip

Translated from the Spanish by Elizabeth Horan

1. Presad

Presad is asleep on my white sheets in the semi-darkness of my bedroom, the window open to the Phoenix night air. They always say that when you're in love with someone, you like seeing them sleep. I'm sure there's at least something close to love in the feelings his profile on the pillow awakens in me, seeing his dark body set against the lunar clarity of the sheets. Presad's breathing is deep and slow; his relaxed body becomes more real, more material, more profoundly Presad than anything else I know about his life at present. I see him sleep and he becomes more the young, carefree Indian from Bangalore, and less the engineer who zips from one side of Phoenix to another in his big shiny truck, who pays the mortgage on his big new house in a new part of town, who works in the spacious offices of a roadway construction company, who plays golf on the exquisitely-tended, well-watered golf courses amid the aridity of the desert in which this city is growing.

Presad sleeps and I imagine that he dreams, and that he dreams of mountains and forests, of a wooden house in the middle of a forest high in the mountains north of Bangalore. I am thinking of moist heat and lush greenery, and vague plants with gigantic leaves and ferns – I don't know anything about plants, and least of all the ones they'd have in southern India, but I have an intuition of the verdant, vegetal fabric, the intensity of color. I think of his friends, other young men from Bangalore like him, equally lithe, dark, slender... I don't know what Presad dreams about, but I sense that Phoenix is almost entirely absent from his dreams just as it's almost entirely absent from mine, although it's been almost four years since I came here from Buenos Aires to study for a PhD in literature that I have yet to finish. What sorts of fantasies would Presad have about my Buenos Aires, if he had any, that is? I like to imagine the landscape of southern India where his dreams probably take place, although I know it's also quite probable that I don't appear at all, in that landscape.

The story moves forward with an account of my relationship with Presad, from our having met in the stu-

dents' locker-room of the University gym four years ago, to the times when he visited me in my studio apartment – he lived with four roommates from India in a small apartment close to the University – until his graduation. Our regular meetings never evolved into a daily routine but nonetheless entailed a certain intimacy; the announcement of a wedding with a girl that his family from Bangalore arranged for him, the plans for the big wedding, back there, while he kept on working here. He would go off to Bangalore to get married and return with his wife to his big new house, change jobs and move with her to another state.

The story develops along the same lines as the relationship, with an admixture of intimacy and distance, of my attraction towards him intermingled with the fantasies about Indians, East Asians that I've always had, fantasies that take shape with him. (When I was a teenager I saw My Beautiful Laundrette, and it made me fantasize about a love story of this sort.) Further, there'd be a certain disenchantment caused by the combination of his tendency towards distance set off by the enthusiasm of his hints at deeper intimacy.

2 The Sleepers

Another story that I have wanted to write for some time now would develop from what I have observed in people close to me (my lovers, my friends, my parents) when they're sleeping. The fragment about my watching Presad could open this story as well, although this story's form is somewhat less strictly narrative in structure, and follows, instead, the more digressive structure of the "crónica," the tale of a traveler writing of various adventures, far from home. This one develops from the differences between the images of people when they're awake, versus when they're asleep. When a person is asleep, certain aspects of their "waking" image, and particularly whatever's related to gender, appears to be suspended. In the "sleeping image" there appears a fluidity between what's masculine and what's feminine, producing an image entirely different from the waking image, which involves multiple signs more definitively tied to femininity and to masculinity. There's also a greater fluid-

ity between the image of one person and those of others, as when I saw Presad sleeping, where there was a continuity between his image and José's, my closest friend, whom I'd known in Buenos Aires before coming to Phoenix.

Of the sometimes contradictory feelings that develop while watching people sleep, I describe how the sleeper may well give the impression of submissiveness, of seeming defenseless and trusting in others. Those who don't give, who don't "give themselves up" to another's protection won't give that impression. Instead, they do just that: they "give up," unaware that anyone's there, they can sleep through a conversation.

I was saying that the situation of gender can shift, sometimes according to age, giving an unexpected image of maturity or youth. Even ethnicity shifts, as if recessive traits otherwise imperceptible in the "waking" image, were making themselves evident. What also changes, of course, are the meanings arising from the sleeping image: peace or restlessness, joy, sadness, pain, mystic flights and corporeal ones. As my mind ranges over the persons whom I love and whom I watch in their sleep, I develop brief sketches in which I outline some of my characters, some from Phoenix and others from Buenos Aires, such as María Silva. The story also has metatextual referents arising from the suggestion of a documentary in which these figures would be filmed:

I wouldn't want to write a short story or a crónica, or for my short story, my crónica to resemble a documentary. I would like to depict individuals while they sleep. Like those of a friend whom I've always loved very much, María Silva. In my hypothetical documentary, María Silva would be seen in bed, but I need to say a bit more here, because the name "María Silva" says much less than the image or depiction of María Silva would, which is exactly what I want to convey, not her name, which could be any name (although I'm not inspired to change it). María Silva, who recently turned 30, is chronically in love with a woman, a famous director of movies who doesn't treat María Silva well. When she gets far enough away from the famous director, she becomes obsessed with an anonymous woman whose profession I don't recall, quite possibly because she doesn't have one, she has only a husband and two daughters, both quite young.

Unlike other people facing this sort of sentimental situation, María doesn't get all bogged down and heavy in relating her frustrations as a would-be lover. She's highly entertaining and she knows how to listen when another person relates their obsessions.

She lives in an apartment way up in a high-rise in the most densely populated neighborhood of Buenos Aires. The apartment has many windows and gives something of the sensation of floating in the air. At night, it's as if the apartment were more deeply buried

in space, and the edges of María's sleep are closer to the night's starry sky than they are to the walls of her house. There is something cosmic in María's manner of sleeping. She sleeps as if the day had been tremendously demanding, exhausting, and as if sleep wouldn't arise from her as anything but the boon of the benevolent god who'd decided to intervene and help her. Through that god's intervention. María's face takes on a mystic aura. There is something faith-drenched in her aura, although far from the silly triviality that seems essential to illustrators of fairy tales.

María goes to bed very late, and when she gets up very early, it's incredibly difficult for her to get out. She drinks a lot of coffee and goes out to teach her classes in Spanish and in French. When she brings her classes to a close, she's somewhere between speedy and tired, and she takes a small dose of Xanax or Valium and returns home, and she writes, while she waits for the sedative to take effect. Then she has to go out again to give another class or to the University; then she meets up with friends and smokes some marijuana, and night comes on, and she feels that the day wasn't as she had wanted and she's seized by an urge for expansiveness and is inclined to use cocaine to remain awake, for life can be marvelous, and the night could last long, she can give the movie director a call but the director doesn't answer, and suddenly she knows and feels that she should sleep, and takes a sedative, and goes to bed. With the chemical and emotional crossfire she's propelled into a state of curious lucidity and calm, so that she starts to read, sometimes for more than one, as long as two hours. All a person needs to do is to be able to read calmly, without interruption, she told me once, with a sigh, and gently mocking herself, when I spent the night at her place, and as she settled into sleep.

3. Travelers on Aerolíneas Argentinas

I want to set another story on the plane that flies from Los Angeles to Buenos Aires. It's a 14-hour flight, normally at night: it leaves Los Angeles in the afternoon and arrives in Buenos Aires in the morning. I have a draft about my contact with one particular passenger. A traveler will share the night with seeming strangers whose faces are vaguely familiar, since many are from the same country as I am, although they are, at the same time, complete strangers – people with whom I wouldn't have the slightest connection in my country. All of this leads to the development of these fantasies: the fact of this shared space and these shared hours of lost temporal and spatial references, while sharing with others the experience of eating, then going off into and returning from sleep, a shared time that's devoid of use.

My short story shows my fantasies regarding one passenger in particular: a man of some 35 years, more or less redheaded, more studied than athletic in

appearance, wearing expensive sports clothing: the very appearance of people of the wealthier classes in Buenos Aires, quite far from any kind of serious intellectual activity whatsoever, far from my own less-wealthy, politically more progressive background. These two social classes don't mix, don't know one another, and harbor some mutual disdain.

As we're seated next to one another, a kind of closeness slowly begins to emerge, between the reality of progressive contact and fantasized anticipations. We eventually separate a bit, leaving an empty seat between us, which announces the end of our short-lived relation; we awaken to daylight, the story circulates among the other people in the airline and the scene concludes with the announcement that the plane is closing in on the airport of Buenos Aires, so that the correspondence between the map and what is seen from the window now returns us to the world while the "link" created in the hours of travel dissolves.

far down below the equally inhospitable and dark ocean, or perhaps someplace over the Amazonian jungle, as it seems to me on the small screen, which moves from marking the itinerary to indicating the temperature outside where it's 40° below zero, and inside, a capsule of heat and the promise of our contact amid the cold. Here we are, outside of everything, ever so slightly detached from the planet; we are not gods, but only small creatures that they whimsically favored, and different, apart from the fate of the rest of humanity, separated from the world's cares, with people who watch over us and feed us; we can sleep and dream and wake up and have sex and this seems like it could be eternal, the trip is so long, but every once in a while we've had enough and we want it all to end, we are as ungrateful to the gods as so many creatures are. I maintain my contact with his leg; now my hand is closing in. There. ■

Sleep, heat, and his relaxation make the blood circulate freely through his body, and his penis responds; the pleats of his trousers suggest as much. His penis continues responding over time: his body is crossing that threshold from simple well-being towards an accumulated energy that wants to revert to sex. My leg grazes his and the contact ceases to be casual, going from a moment's touch to a more sustained contact. There it is, my heart is pounding although my movements are strictly controlled. By now I've gotten the message that there's no more casualness here and we've entered the realm of the premeditated, of sheer free will. We stay quiet, but the contact is open and can continue.

There's slowness in our movements, and before the contact can go any further, each of us can foretell what the other will find. Before engaging – despite the smallest move towards coming together, it already seems to be defined that I will be the one to take the initiative, the one who “does,” and he'll be the one who “lets it be done” – I imagine that my hand will go to the crotch, that I'll slowly make a place for myself by way of the zipper, the underwear, my touch will move towards understanding how to cross those small barriers: we have so much time. My mouth will go down, under the blanket; a smooth genital odor will emanate from the open quarters of his crotch, preserved over the recent hours; it's a lukewarm, agreeable smell. As a hygienic boy he would have bathed quite carefully before boarding the plane. I imagine he might well have said, “it's a long journey and it's the only way to arrive in Buenos Aires in a decent state.”

The permanent buzzing drowns out other sounds in the deep night of this travel: 2, 4 o'clock in the morning, I don't know the hours of departure or arrival. It's night because people are sleeping, because it's dark, we are literally in the middle of the night and

Rock Garden

Peter Dubé

52

Maybe you met him in a dream, a dream about a forest somewhere. Maybe he seemed a little wild. Maybe he was a feral child, innocent of language, making strange sounds in the back of his throat that themselves, alone, were eloquent. Could be you were both naked, naked as your first moment, and covered in blood.

He shoves aside branches, breaking through the underbrush and comes toward you. The trees rearing up are older than any city on the planet, their design only slightly less deliberate. His unbelievable body, caked in mud, the hair on his head, his chest, his groin plastered flat as an idol's shadow at midday.

The absence of the sound of metal is everywhere.

When the greenery parts, the stream of sunlight hits him like a knife, carving him out of the landscape, turning him into this. It is inappropriate, confusing and gorgeous. Nobody questions. He fills the space between the trees completely, and you are hungry to be joining him. An effort of sound shudders its way through his chest. When you step towards him, space is meaningless.

There is something about the small of his back – hollowed from his flesh as if it were meant only to contain – that makes you imagine the extinction of whole races of animals.

Viewed from a certain angle he reminds you of family, the distance in his eyes, the look of abstraction in his face. The closeness of him to you now, at this very moment, perhaps. You want to take him away, show him something else, but you know that can't happen. There is too much of all of this in him. His nipples like chestnuts, and the flattened knots of his hair an untended place. He could not move effectively. You must have him here, if at all.

The morning's moisture, rising up, cracks like breaking glass.

When he holds your hand you feel a flash across your neck, your tongue seems thick in your mouth and a loss of language seizes you, shocking and rapid – a knife across the throat. You feel yourself falling backwards, wondering about the future, if there is one, if there ever was. The canopy of trees tangles up

the sky like tossed aside alphabet blocks and when he lies on top of you – you want to tell him stories.

There was a time when you wanted only to know how other people lived – the woman up the street who grew the magnificent Skater's Waltz chrysanthemums in her yard, and the Pennine Jewels, and had that bluish tint to her hair. Every day you watched her at work wondering how from this effort, her effort, small and old, bent over in the dirt, such beauty could happen. It seemed wrong that such wonder could only come into the world from so much work. Beautiful things should just happen, you always thought. This was long ago. They should just happen. But every day, there she was, up early and out in her yard, caring for immature plants and nurturing those that had begun to grow. And when you saw her there, stooped among the lavish colours, bathed in sunlight, blossoms abundant, it didn't matter how or why – just that these flowers were beautiful and that she, somehow or other, made sure they were there.

When you were young, waiting for a bus, a strange car slowed down, right in front of you, and you got in, knowing you shouldn't.

There are footprints in the dirt, spiraling in circles.

But foliage overpowers, green, tempestuous and moist. He holds you, and you – him. His mouth filled with savage smells, raspberry, blackberry, animal smells, too. The memories of more restrained gardens and sunlight on slick flesh and shining hood ornaments are gone, too vague to dwell upon. Behind you, maybe, something with blue eyes stirs, pure and panicking. You jump in the prison of your skin and want to speak.

You want to tell him stories but the sky is knotted up by the trees, and he is there on top of you only by virtue of having cut himself free of the landscape, and maybe it is – after all – a dream, and you, here, now, present, accounted, naked and covered in mud, have for the sake of passion cut the language from your throat. ■

Anna Bendix

The Purple, White and Green*

In Rouen, God spoke to Joan of Arc.
In Shadwell, my vision is Christabel.
Dock-men brawl, *Ain't she beautiful?*
as she tops a lorry to lecture, in blue silk.

Christabel catches in one sure hand a cabbage
fast-bowled at her throat. *I knew you'd lose*
your head over me, old goat! she calls, to howls.
I am lost in the rose of her vowels. Envisage

marching at her side, crying *Give women the vote!*
The bobby's hams for hands at my breast
where bruises spread. At Clement's Inn, Christabel
plans, at ease in Japanese slippers and kimono.

Covering my skin is a sheet pulled taut.
I lie on her bed like a sword.

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* the colour-scheme of the militant suffragettes, led by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, was purple for justice, white for purity and green for hope.

Being in Missouri

Andrew Warburton

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It seems strange to me now – almost embarrassing, in fact – that I, a Brit (with cultural pretensions, to say the least), would come to Missouri, the heart of America, to find myself in an article written by my professor, a tenured radical called Ellie Ragland, famous, it seems, for espousing Lacan even when nobody is listening. But it's true. People ask: why did you go to *Missouri* for a PhD in Literature? And I cannot answer. To find myself in an article? To test my ability to construct a semblance (*veil?*) over something that seems so patently absurd? What becomes clear from experience is that neither of these explanations are easily proffered (without some long and arduous back-story) in response to the casual enquiry of, say, an *East Coast* or *West Coast* grad student who doesn't even know where Missouri *is*, let alone would consider living here. It's not that I haven't seen other parts of America – I spent a week in Boston last Thanksgiving, and this summer I'll be spending six weeks at Cornell – but being a poor student and so very far away, it's the getting there that's difficult (last time, I travelled by *Greyhound* through the “armpit” of America and watched, with an ever-increasing sense of doom, as the wastelands of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois unfolded inexorably before me); and besides, what I'm trying to get at here is that, in order to answer the question of why I live *here*, in *Missouri*, I lack a semblance that works.

It was my friend Svitlana who suggested I construct one. Moving here from the Ukraine on a Fulbright scholarship, she spent the first few years wallowing in a depression, only recently emerging from the pit of the question “*Why-on-earth-am-I-in-Missouri?*” to discover the truth (or the lie) of the situation: that she was here to study psychoanalysis under Professor Ellie Ragland. The inability to answer the question “why” boils down, after all, to the presence of another, unanswered question: that posed by Hamlet as “to be or not to be?” What Svitlana had to justify – and what I will have to justify soon – was an affirmative answer to this question; only then would she know exactly why she was here – in the state of Missouri, of all places (pronounced, if you

will, *Mis-er-y*). But in order to do this, she had to *be* something and the “being” she sought – and thank god, found – was that she could describe herself, in the third person, as “Ellie Ragland's student.” Only then did she allow herself to smile.

My response to the same unfathomable question was to set up a study group at Ellie Ragland's home and become a Lacan-devotee. Something about the atmosphere in Ellie's back room – the evanescent, watery beautifulness of the light – captured my eye and gave me a feeling of elation. We drank iced tea from tall crystal glasses (which nevertheless tasted, to my bitter mind, of every mile the water must have travelled from the ocean) and sat on soft chairs, surrounded by ferns and wicker-spun fans, listening to insects pattering against the screens. Sinking into a state of deep relaxation, our somewhat barren Midwest location seemed to infuse our discussions with ever more alien connotations. Mainly we spoke about desire and Lacan, but sometimes we spoke about how we, ourselves, were implicated in our discussions. Then Beauty would arise from the folds of our conversation and spread a red hazy veil across the room.

Ellie was an older woman, perhaps approaching sixty-five, with soft, translucent skin that always appeared slightly damp. Before I applied to the program two years ago, I knew who she was from her department profile and had the vaguest idea of becoming a kind of apprentice. The photograph on the website showed a slightly startled-looking intellectual, with dangling earrings, black-rimmed eyes and bright red lips – a look that differentiated her, as far as I was concerned, from all the other, drab-looking professors I had to pretend to be interested in in order to get a place on the program. Like the narrator in Donna Tart's *A Secret History*, who must drop all his classes in order to become a student of the eccentric Classics professor, my fantasy of studying under Ellie Ragland was based on an elitist dream. Theory has always been elitist – that, at least, is one thing I didn't have to invent – but when I heard that the theorist in question was flying back and forth between Paris and St. Louis, sitting on dissertation

committees at the Sorbonne and mingling with the likes of Jacques-Alain Miller (Lacan's son-in-law), there was something doubly attractive – almost intoxicating – about her.

I can't deny that the first time I met her I was slightly disappointed. Holding, in front of her, a pile of typed pages, she spent the whole class period paraphrasing "The Mirror Stage," the most basic of Lacan's essays (which I'd read a long time before), without adding anything of the remotest interest. Finally, she looked up with a sparkle in her eye and, her tone unchanged, lapsed into what can only be described as a *wholly other discourse*. The night before, she said, she'd dreamt she was lying in a steaming bath, a martini in one hand and a cigarette in the other, when an enormous phallus had sprouted from the water. Pinkish, contorted and covered with blood, it flung itself desperately against the rim of the bath, attempting to escape onto the floor, and though she did, in fact, try to grab it between her knees, it writhed so obscenely in the now bloodied water that she was finally forced to let go. For a while, she lay there, sipping her martini as the phallus crawled across the bathroom floor, and then she got up and hosed herself down. What this might have meant, she gave no indication, but announcing her departure, left us all in silence.

Perhaps it was her candidness in relating this dream that (beyond my fantasies) attracted me to her in the first place. There was a kind of refreshing naughtiness about her that existed side by side with the sense of a deeper enigma. Quickly, I enrolled in both her classes and for the rest of the semester studied nothing but Lacan. "You're putting your eggs in one basket," said the other, drearier professors. But their idle talk couldn't stop me. I was addicted. Enthralled. Intoxicated by the sound of Professor Ragland's drawl! Why, after all, when I was studying *desire* and the "defiles of the signifier," would I care about marketing myself as a teacher of literature? Finding myself wanting to impress her at first, I would spend the whole time quoting Heidegger in class, talking about the differences between Derrida and Lacan; it wasn't until the first frosts of winter had arrived that I realised my efforts weren't having the desired effect – that my try-hard patter, though full of good intention, had absented the dimension of my *being* from the equation, leaving only the shell of "empty speech." Ellie knew this, of course – she's Lacanian, for goodness sake – but what I never thought to ask myself was how on earth I meant to impress her when I wasn't even *present* in my *speech*? The semblance I'd been forging, it seems, was utterly self-defeating.

One night, we decided to drive to St. Louis to see Slavoj Žižek give a talk at Washington University. Although Ellie was worried about coming because of

the snowstorm that was forecast that night, she knew Žižek personally and wanted to accompany us anyway. Taking to the road in Svitlana's beat up Nissan, we hit Interstate 70 in high spirits, expecting to be in St. Louis no later than 7pm and excited by the prospect of seeing Žižek in our adopted home.

Now, Midwestern cities aren't like other cities as far as I'm aware (although the difference is hard to describe to someone who's not actually been in one). What happens in the case of a *normal* city is that the unmistakable presence of *dwelling*s announces that you have, in fact, entered a city, but in the case of the great St. Louis, this is simply not the case. From certain directions, you can even find yourself in the *middle* of the city without having seen an urban landscape at all. How is this possible? I don't know. Not only do big chunks of countryside exist outside the central area, the only dwellings one comes across as one does, eventually, "enter" the city are abandoned, burnt-out homes. (Let me tell you, also, that there aren't many more depressing feelings for a Brit in Middle America than expecting to come within sight of humanity and finding, instead, *not much*).

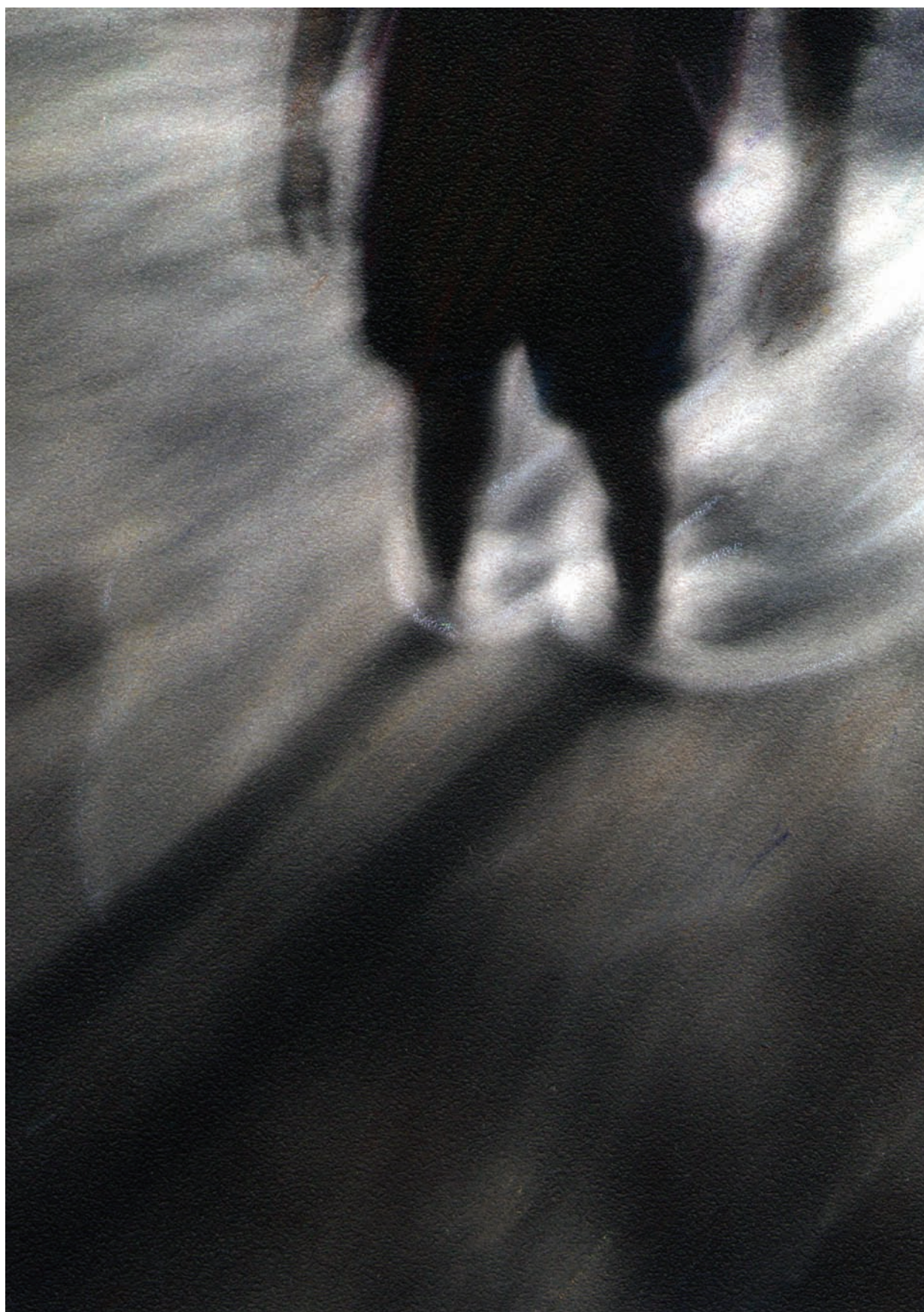
As the presence of row upon row of crumbling buildings increased, we decided that we must, at last, be within city limits. It was then that the snow began to fall. First softly, then hurriedly, like so many crystals from the night sky. It settled everywhere, whitening everything. And as it increased, the traffic slowed, until finally, with the snow coming down like the thickest rain, the cars stopped completely. "Damn!" said Svitlana, slamming her mitten-covered fists into the wheel. I looked at the time. "We're not going to make it," I said.

"No matter," said Ellie, fishing in her handbag as if there were no problem at all. "Here's that article, by the way, that I promised you the other day."

The article she was talking about – one she'd written for a collection of essays on homosexuality and psychoanalysis – was called "Lacan and the Homosexuelle: A Love Letter." I'd been meaning to get hold of a copy for some time now, but tonight, with the car ziz-zagging across the Interstate, and Svitlana and Ellie talking between themselves, and the snow falling down so beautifully, I began to read, at first slowly, not intending to finish it, but gradually becoming more and more absorbed, until finally I realised I might as well read it all. By the time I'd finished and dropped it in my lap, I had the stunning realisation that I had found my semblance; not only had it arrived and fallen into place, like the very snow that was falling from the sky, it had come to me now at a time when I'd least expected it, when I wasn't consciously asking for it at all. Here was an article that described who I was, if not in my being, at least in the "form" that my being took – from my love of the feminine to my desiring the phallus. Even

though the article in question was slightly old-fashioned, especially its arguments against thinkers who are perhaps more respected than Lacan today and its über-radical conclusions (“By his very existence, [the hommosexuelle] tears at the underpinnings of culture, based as it is on a sexual lie”), this didn’t bother me too much: only a week or so ago, a professor in another field had pointed out that there’s nothing wrong with orthodox theory, not if it works in practice. It was more the sentiment of the piece that moved me: the love Ellie expressed for the homosexual make-up (structural, not genetic) and the love she’d received, in return, from the homosexual man. Although the piece purported to be about the homosexual’s love for Woman and the myth of an “essential femininity,” it seemed to me that, really, the piece was about Ellie’s own love for her gay male friends and the “feminine” gay man in general.

I turned and looked at the falling snow. At Svitlana, laughing at the wheel. At Ellie, wrapping her shawl around her. And then I felt the car slipping under us and we were floating, for a moment, on the ice, my head feeling strangely light. The streetlamps were too bright. And the whole of the West End of St. Louis was opening up before us. I could see the backs of the houses, their cluttered yards and lovely bricks, and there, above the streets, the dangling wires I’d seen in Boston, and a metro gliding by, carrying people across the city. For an instant, I must admit, with the falling snow and the houses in a row and the university approaching, the city looked beautiful indeed. I have found my “semblance,” I thought. I have found my “being” in this moment. ■



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Chroma: Biographies

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Judith Barrington has published three collections of poetry including *Horses* and *the Human Soul*. *Lifesaving: A Memoir* won the Lambda Book Award and was a finalist for the PEN/Martha Albrand Award. She is a faculty member of the University of Alaska's MFA Program and lives in Oregon with her partner.

Anna Bendix lives in Brighton and works as an archivist. Her poems have been published in magazines including *Poetry News*, *Dream Catcher* and *Seam*, in the 2007 International Open Poetry Sonnet Competition anthology, *Hand Luggage Only*.

Jay Bernard is a writer from London. Her first pamphlet *Your Sign* is *Cuckoo Girl* was PBS choice for summer 2008 and she is currently poet in residence in an Oxford community garden. She has drawn graphic essays for *Culture Wars* and her first regular comic strip, *Budo*, was published in *Litro*. She blogs at brnrdr.wordpress.com.

Jade Brooks grew up between the railroad tracks and the blackberry bushes in Eugene, Oregon. She currently enjoys dinner parties, dynamite, dictionaries and daredevil midnight bike rides. She lives in San Francisco, surrounded by a quorum of queers and other troublemakers.

Jennifer Camper is a cartoonist and graphic artist living in Brooklyn. Her books include *Rude Girls* and *Dangerous Women* and *subGURLZ*, and she is the editor of the comix anthology series *Juicy Mother*. Her cartoons and illustrations have appeared in magazines, newspapers, comic books and anthologies, and have been exhibited in the US and Europe. See more at jennifercamper.com

Ching-In Chen is a multi-genre, border-crossing writer and the author of *The Heart's Traffic* (Arktoi Books/Red Hen Press, 2009). The daughter of Chinese immigrants to the United States, she is a Kundiman and Lambda Fellow. Her work appeared recently in *Quarterly West*, *BorderSenses* and *Verdad*.

Donna Collier is an American loving and living in London. Donna won a creative non-fiction award from The Museum Of London for her short story, *Same As James*. Ms. Collier was also selected by Chroma to participate in The DIVINE Mentoring Scheme for Emerging Queer Writers. Her short story, *Better Than Money* was published in *BRAND* magazine and she is currently working on a novel called *Summer Breeze*.

Simon Croft is a London-based trans-man. Primarily a visual artist, he makes the occasional foray into the written word. Much of his work draws on his own experiences and on the paradoxes inherent in trans-life, the challenges and insights. He's particularly interested in the way different aspects of creative endeavour come together in the trans/queer community and contribute to a rapidly evolving cultural expression of trans and queer experiences.

Peter Dubé is a Montreal-based novelist, short story writer, essayist and cultural critic. He is the author of the novel *Hovering World* (DC Books 2002), a collection of linked short stories, *At the Bottom of the Sky*, (DC Books, 2007), and the chapbook *Vortex Faction Manifesto* (Vortex Editions 2001). He is the editor of *Madder Love: Queer Men and the Precincts of Surrealism* (Rebel Satori Press, 2008). See more at peterdube.com.

Ben Fergusson is a British writer and translator based in Berlin. He has a story forthcoming in *FuseLit*, and is currently working on a novel as part of Chroma's DIVINE Mentoring Scheme. He is developing a bilingual short story project in Berlin and London.

Merry Gangemi is an MFA student at Vermont College of Fine Arts. She holds an MA in comparative literature from San Francisco State University, and a BA from New York University. Gangemi produces and hosts *Woman-Stirred Radio*, a queer cultural journal at wgdr.org. She lives in Woodbury, Vermont.

UK-born **Carl Gopal** (aka **Carl Gopalkrishnan**) is a painter & writer working in acrylic, mixed media and photography. Recent projects include a series of paintings exploring the new Obama administration through the combined metaphors of *chanson de geste* and the American musical. Carl works from his studio in Perth, Western Australia. See more at carlgopal.com.

Marita Gootee is a Professor of Art at Mississippi State University. She received an MFA from Indiana State University and a BA from the College of Mount Saint Joseph on the Ohio. She has been selected 5 times for the Mississippi Invitational at the Mississippi Museum of Art that showcases the state's most significant contemporary artists. Her work was selected for the 2008 "Women to Watch" Invitational at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC. See more at maritagootee.com and maritagooteephotographer.com.

Elizabeth Horan teaches at Arizona State University in Tempe, publishes creative non-fiction and translations from Spanish to English, and is writing a document-based biography of the Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral, which explores the relations between the worlds of poetry, diplomacy, and trans/queer identities among Latin American provincials and expatriates. This partial account of discovering and working with a previously closed, vast private archive is dedicated to Doris Atkinson and Susan Smith; also with thanks to the Archivo del Escritor of the National Library of Chile.

Josh McNey spent his childhood in Southern California, just west of Los Angeles. His three brothers skated and surfed and it was through photographing them that he began to recognize his passion for making pictures. After graduating from high school and spending seven years in the US Marine Reserves, he moved to NY to pursue his passion for photography. Recent projects include an extensive series of college wrestling photos and another focused on the modern American cowboy.

Catherine McNeil is from Vancouver, BC. She is the recipient of the Milieu Emerging Writer's contest for her book under the influence, and has a poem from her new manuscript the reader's guide to fearful love coming out in *Rampike*. Publications include: *Event*, *Capilano Review*, *Whetstone* and anthologies: *Exact Fare Two*, *The Fed Anthology*.

Susan Massotty is an award-winning translator who has also translated *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *My Father's Notebook* (Kader Abdolah), *All Souls Day* (Cees Nooteboom), *Wedding by the Sea* (Abdelkader Benali) and *The Kreutzer Sonata* (Margriet de Moor). She lives and works in The Netherlands.

Eduardo Muslip was born and lives in Buenos Aires, where he has published novels (*Hojas de la noche*, *Fondo Negro*) and short story collections (*Examen de residencia*, *Plaza Irlanda*). Phoenix, a collection of stories based in Phoenix, Arizona, where he lived and studied for some years, is about to be published.

Havana-born **Achy Obejas** is the author of *Ruins*, *Days of Awe* and various other books, including the best selling chapbook, *This is What Happened in Our Other Life*. She translated, into Spanish, Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and, into English, the stories of *Havana Noir*, which she also edited. She is currently the Sor Juana Visiting Writer at DePaul University in Chicago.

Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin is a Swedish photographer and an artist. She is most famous for her exhibition *Ecce Homo*, first shown during Euro Pride in Stockholm in 1998. See more at ohlson.se.

William Reichard is an author, editor, and educator. He's published three poetry collections, most recently, *This Brightness* (Mid-List Press, 2007). His next, *Sin Eater*, will be released in 2010. Reichard is the editor of *The Evening Crowd* at Kirmser's: *A Gay Life in the 1940's* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Astrid H. Roemer was born in Paramaribo, Suriname, in 1947. She emigrated to the Netherlands in 1966, where she made her debut as a poet in 1970. She now has a considerable oeuvre to her name, including poetry *Noordzeblues* (North Sea Blues, 1985), a play *Dichter bij mij schreeuw ik*, (Closer to Me I Shout, 1991), a novella *Levenslang gedicht* (Lifelong Poem, 1987) and several novels, amongst them *Lijken op liefde* (Looks Like Love), from which an extract appears in this issue.

Matthew Stradling's work has been exhibited internationally and he has had twelve solo exhibitions in London and Paris. Recent paintings are featured in the touring exhibition *Fellow Travellers*. He has also exhibited in the Sotheby's Young Artist

International Touring Exhibition, the BP Portrait Award and 'Likeness - Reflecting Sexuality.' His work has been featured in Square Peg, Rouge, Time Out and Blue magazines. Matthew studied Painting at St. Martin's School of Art and gained a Masters from the University of Reading.

Phillip Tang is an Australian writer living in London. His fiction has appeared in *Growing Up Asian* in Australia, *Peril* magazine, *Westerly* and *Visible Ink*. He is writing his first novel, *The Night We Vanish*, set in Vietnam and Australia, for which he was granted a Varuna Fellowship in 2007. He has worked as a travel-guide editor and as a freelance writer for various magazines and websites.

Robyn Vinten came to England from New Zealand in 1986 and forgot to leave. She has had several short stories published over the years, one in each of the *Diva* anthologies and in a couple of

Women's Press anthologies. She works as an optician, plays football in winter and does triathlons in the summer.

Andrew Warburton earned his MA in Creative Writing at Bath Spa University and is now pursuing a PhD in Romanticism, queer theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis at Tufts University, near Boston. Contrary to his piece in this issue of *Chroma*, he recently spent two very enjoyable years as a graduate student in Columbia, Missouri. His short story "The Forest of Suicides" appears in *Best Gay Romance* 2009.

Gregory Woods is one of the world's leading authorities on gay literature. His latest poetry collection is *Quidnunc* (Carcenet, 2007). Peter Porter calls him "the poet with the sharpest technique for social verse in Britain today." Sinead Morrissey calls him "Probably, the finest gay poet in the UK." See more at gregorywoods.co.uk.

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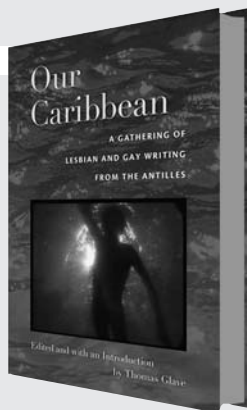
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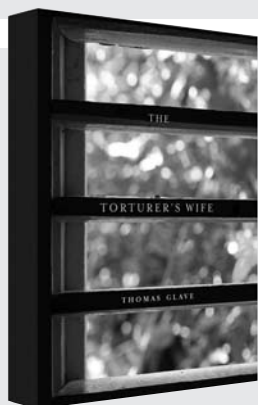
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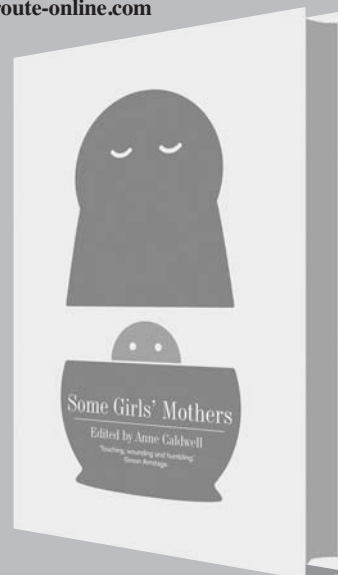
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